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Cordially Yours
Clara Louise Barnham

DR. LATIMER

A Story of Casco Bay

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM



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DR. LATIMER.

CHAPTER I.

MISS NORMAN'S NEIGHBORS.

THERE was excitement in the house of Norman, one spring. Most women, when they have an absorbing interest, have also a sister-woman with whom to discuss it in all its aspects; but Miss Charlotte Norman was denied this piquant social sauce. Her younger sister and nephew, with whom—and it might be added for whom—she lived, were both unavailable and unsatisfactory as receptacles for her confidences. Miss Agnes Norman was too preoccupied during the few waking hours she spent at home to return more than an abstracted “Indeed?” to Charlotte’s information, and Dickie, being but six years of age, could not be expected to enter into and comprehend his aunt’s outraged sensibilities.

The disturbing fact was that certain parties had had the audacity to put up a very unattractive two-story flat-building directly across the street from the old Norman homestead. Miss Charlotte, in her resentment, had moved her work-basket

away from its usual window in order that she might be spared the offense of seeing its bricks laid, one by one. Now it was finished, and one of its stories was occupied. It was hard indeed that Miss Charlotte, from her sister's departure after breakfast until the evening dinner hour, had no one to join her in watching, censuring, and conjecturing about her new neighbors.

She performed the task, however, with solitary energy. These people had but just moved in, and Miss Norman's curiosity impelled her to hover often about her windows, and to take note, though with unvarying disapproval, of their movements and belongings.

One morning, an hour after Agnes had left the house for her music-room in the city, Miss Charlotte observed a young woman emerge from the opposite door upon which she kept such a watchful eye.

The Norman house stood upon a corner, and seeing the stranger cross the street, Miss Charlotte rushed with undignified haste to a side window, from which she knew she would be able to get a near view of her.

The girl looked up at the house, as she passed, with some interest; and Miss Norman, through the half-turned slats of the blinds, took note of her erect and graceful carriage, her plain, trim clothing, and a face framed in dark hair, whose expression, lacking humility, did not conciliate the watcher. So might a princess look and move were

she roaming in humble disguise in a strange neighborhood. Miss Charlotte gazed after her with one more grudge against the opposite house.

Not more than another hour passed before she was again agitated by the fact that a furniture wagon stopped before the flat. Miss Norman was at her post in front of the house in an instant, gazing with all her eyes at the brick building, behind whose upper windows forms could be seen occasionally, flitting to and fro.

"For pity's sake, are those little things chairs? What do they want chairs of that size for?" she murmured, putting her head forward and looking with still closer scrutiny through her eyeglasses.

At this moment she was gratified to hear the postman's whistle. Miss Norman had scant interest in the mail that day, but an excuse to go to the gate was not unwelcome; and, without waiting to wrap herself from the keen March air, she hurried down the garden path, and after exchanging a word with the postman and receiving a paper from his hand, lingered to watch from this better post of observation her unknown neighbors. While she gazed, a young girl of about eighteen ran down the flight of stairs visible through the open door, and stood on the sidewalk while the furniture was lifted from the wagon. She wore a large apron over her blue dress, and her light hair was awry. She touched a chair with her hand, and then examined her fingers.

"Helen," she called clearly up the stairs, "these

chairs are awfully dusty. Don't let them go into that clean room until we have wiped them."

This exhortation did little to alleviate Miss Norman's curiosity; but she listened attentively, meanwhile scrutinizing the girl, who was too busy counting the chairs to observe that she was being watched.

"Well, she looks pert enough," thought Miss Norman, actually going to the length of holding her eyeglasses a few inches away from her face, the better to distinguish the somewhat disheveled but business-like and unconscious maiden, who, following the expressman upstairs with his last load, disappeared from her view.

Miss Norman, restoring her glasses to their usual position, became conscious of the approach on the sidewalk of a form she recognized. She drummed gently with her paper on the gate, and the wind blew her locks, whose blonde color disguised the fact that they were fast turning from drab to gray.

"Good-morning, Persis," she said to the woman, who drew nearer with energetic step, one arm swinging, while on the other hung a basket.

"Good-mornin', Miss Charlotte. Ain't you cold, hangin' over the gate? I guess you've got an idea it's springtime, have n't you?" remarked the newcomer, smiling, as she paused. "I noticed this mornin' the lilac buds was a-swellin' some."

"Oh, no; I just came down to get the mail," explained the other. "I've hardly become used to having the letters delivered yet; have you?"

"No, and for one I don't like these citified changes. It's bad enough to belong to the city by name, but the buildin' up close and tight and not leavin' us any breathin' room is what hurts me the most."

"Yes," returned Miss Norman sympathetically. "Just look at that flat-building across the street. See how it grows right up out of the sidewalk, and remember the pleasant garden that used to be there. How the Dwights could sell their ground for such a purpose I can't imagine."

Persis shifted her basket to the right arm, and followed the direction of the other's glance. "Folks have begun to move in," she observed, as an upper window was thrown open and a duster vigorously shaken forth.

"Yes, the second floor is taken, and by a family which I can't understand. Sister Agnes says she should n't think I would try; but I really cannot help being curious. So far as I can discover, there are three girls in that flat and nobody else. Now, what do you make of it?"

"I should say they was probably settlin' and gettin' ready for their ma, who 'll come later. Like as not their ma enjoys poor health and can't stand confusion."

Miss Norman looked at the speaker reflectively. "Why, Persis, you're real bright," she said. "I never should have thought of that. I'm sure I hope it is so, for it does n't seem to me the thing at all for three young girls to be by themselves in

that way. It would look badly, I think, for them to take a house and live alone. I shall feel differently toward them for what you have said."

Miss Applebee felt flattered. "Them long stairs won't be over and above comfortable for an invalid," she observed, keeping her eyes on the upper windows, grown expressionless now that all sign of life was withdrawn. "Well," she continued, complacently, "I'm glad the doctor's got a bit o' ground around his house, and ain't likely to dispose of it. We've got a few trees and a grape arbor we can call our own, and I hope the doctor'll keep 'em so's we can breathe somethin' beside smoke and grime."

"You have the doctor's dinner there, I suppose," observed Miss Norman, eying the basket.

"Yes, and I only wish I was half as sure that Dr. Latimer would eat it as I am that it's a good dinner. I declare I do get discouraged with him. I contend that a glass o' milk and a book ain't a fillin' meal for anybody that's six foot tall, I don't care how good the book is."

"The doctor's solitary habits grow on him, no doubt," returned Miss Norman.

"Yes, and he's a-lookin' thin. Don't you think so?"

"I suppose he is thin; but one does n't judge the doctor by ordinary standards. Everybody that knows him is so accustomed to leaning on him that we're not apt to remember that he needs any care."

/

"That's it. It does beat all how that man is pestered by folks. He stopped practicin' medicine 'cause his health gave out. Huh!" exclaimed Miss Applebee with scorn. "I should like to know if he might n't as well be at everybody's beck and call, and get some pay for it, as to have things the way they are now! You'd be surprised, Miss Charlotte, to know the things folks'll ask o' Dr. Latimer. Sometimes it's their souls need tinkerin', and then you'd think he was a minister; sometimes it's their bodies, then you'd think he was a doctor; sometimes it's their drains, and then you'd s'pose he was a plumber; then again they've got trouble with their servants or their landlords, and want him to help 'em out, and you'd s'pose he was a lawyer!"

Persis pulled her shawl up around her shoulders with a wrathful gesture.

"It's a fact," acknowledged Miss Norman. "We are not wholly innocent ourselves, my sister and I, though we do try to have some consideration. He is a wonderful man, and I don't think people can help drawing upon him."

"Yes, he's just an earthly angel," said Persis, with another and resigned hitch to her shawl. "And if you think it's an easy job to keep house for an angel, why, you're much mistaken. I'm always expectin' he'll get to be one out o' the flesh, the way he does risk himself in all sorts o' places and with all sorts o' folks. It's a wonder how he never ketches any o' the diseases in them tenements."

Miss Norman shook her head. "Sister Agnes and I often remark that he seems to bear a charmed life. I think I see a difference in him, Persis, in these last years, — a difference for the better, physically."

"Law, yes," returned the housekeeper with a toss of her head. "There ain't the least doubt that the world looks like a better place to him since that — that vampire died!"

"You use strong language."

"Not strong enough, though. There ain't any name strong enough to do her justice that ever I heard of. She took away his happiness," — Miss Applebee made a sweeping gesture with one hand; "she took away his health; she took away all of his money that her ingenuity could lay hands on." She paused dramatically, and Miss Norman nodded her head with the air of one forced to agree.

"Indeed she did," she admitted. "I suppose, first and last, she got thousands."

"Well," ejaculated Persis, her broad countenance regarding Miss Charlotte's slender, long-nosed face, "then when she went to her reward, five years ago, no wonder it sort o' wiped off the slate for the doctor and gave him a fresh start."

"I'm sure we can't be too thankful," began Miss Norman. "His very nobility and determination to crush down his own repugnance rather than drive an erring soul farther along the downward road made him a victim. There, there," she added, alert for signs of life in the opposite house,

"there is one of them now." As she spoke, a young girl in hat and jacket came out of the brick house and crossed the street. As she passed the corner near which Miss Norman and Persis were standing, the girl caught the latter's eye. Her face brightened, and she made a slight, involuntary movement of recognition as she went swiftly on her way.

"Why, she bowed to you," exclaimed Miss Norman in great surprise. "I wonder whom she took you for?"

"Persis Applebee, I guess," remarked that individual dryly. "That girl was to see the doctor a day or two ago. We might 'a' known they'd be after him. It seems she's come out here to keep school. I had some talk with her afore the doctor came home."

"That accounts for a lot of little chairs that went in there this morning," observed Miss Norman. "But how do you suppose they had heard of Dr. Latimer already?"

"Somebody'd given her a letter to him, and she wanted him for a reference in the neighborhood, I believe. Anyhow, I s'pose now he's got another family on his hands worse'n usual, for the girl said she was an orphan."

"Then they have no mother coming to them," said Miss Norman severely. "I don't like it at all. This comes of these vulgar, cheap flats being built up in our neighborhood. Common people are sure to come in. Well, good-by, Persis, I'm

beginning to feel cold, I must n't stand here any longer;" and Miss Norman, coughing delicately behind her hand, went up the path and into the neat, old-fashioned house which retreated from the street behind its shade trees with an air of exclusive refinement.

The little family across the way were not dismissed from her mind, however; and whenever she approached the front windows during the day, she looked down the perspective of her own decorous front yard to the upstart brick house, with its cheap newness of red and white, its bare, angular outline, and its objectionable tenants; and with each view her sense of injury increased.

"We shall have to move away. After all these years we shall have to move away," she soliloquized. "If the neighborhood is going to change like this it will be unbearable."

In fancy she heard the boots of noisy children clatter over the bare staircase opposite. She heard shrill shouts and cries. They were quarrelsome children, and they threw stones which broke her windows, and in spring defaced her flower-garden. Miss Norman suffered a great deal in a few hours from those supposititious pupils, and their numbers would have rejoiced the heart of the young would-be teacher opposite, could the vivid fancy have become fact. Worst of all, these ill-bred children would contaminate Dickie!

Miss Norman looked out of the window apprehensively, as the doubt assailed her, to make cer-

tain that her orphan nephew was in sight. Yes, there he was. She caught a glimpse of his little red scarf at the extreme left of the yard, and heard at the same time the frantic barking of the pug who was his constant companion.

Assured that so far the baleful influence of the opposite house had not begun to take effect upon her treasure, Miss Charlotte seated herself, and, taking from her basket a very abbreviated pair of trousers which needed mending, began to formulate mentally a new set of rules for Dickie's guidance, especially calculated to insure his safety in the presence of such perilous circumstances as were likely soon to surround him.

CHAPTER II.

A FIRST "AT HOME."

THE youngest of the three sisters who had incurred Miss Norman's displeasure was sitting on a table swinging her slippered feet. The hour was seven P. M. and the place was one of the rooms of that flat whose proximity caused Miss Norman's nostrils to dilate disapprovingly.

"Well, here we are, settled for life," the girl remarked cheerfully, looking about her with some satisfaction, and addressing nobody in particular.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Vernon," remarked her eldest sister from the depths of an armchair against whose faded back her head with its coils of silky black hair leaned languidly. "If you are going to maintain such an attitude of abandon for any length of time, I think Helen had better establish a department for etiquette in addition to the kindergarten, and let you attend."

"Certainly, I would take charge of it with pleasure," returned the young girl airily, waving her hand and clicking her heels together as she swung her feet gently. "Anything to oblige Helen," and she looked at the third girl, who sat near, winding a ball of bright worsted. "You

need n't criticise me, Josephine," she added, turning again toward the eldest, "for unless one of us does sit on the table, or under it, I should like to know where we are to stow ourselves when we wish to have a family party here between meals."

"Oh, it is n't so bad as that," said Helen smiling, and lifting her gentle face to the saucy one above her.

"Of course Helen wants to make light of it, having monopolized the one good-sized room for her school;" the speaker suddenly jumped lightly down from her perch, and hugged the worker, to the great detriment of the green worsted ball. "No, no, *no*," she added with explosive affection. "We're glad you have it, Helen." A hearty kiss here for a period. "We *like* to have our dining-room and parlor and reception-room and drawing-room all in one, and about seven by nine in size, don't we, Josephine?"

"Very much, indeed. Especially with the cloth dragged half off the table," replied the low voice in the easy-chair. "Vernon, you're a terror, and now we are shut up in this box you really must be more careful."

Vernon pulled the cloth straight. "Fortunately there is n't much to break," she remarked optimistically.

"Yes, but supposing we should all three take a fancy to get up at once, and should do it *à la* whirlwind, as you do! I don't see," with a sigh, "how there can be so much spring left in you after to-day."

"We have n't either of us worked as hard as you have, Josephine," said Helen sympathetically; "but what a satisfaction it is that we're settled for one while."

"For life," repeated Vernon, who had sprung back to her seat on the table. "As Herr Bruch said when he was so tired after helping his landlady get into the new house, 'Positivela, I do not move again!'"

Josephine laughed, for Vernon's tone brought up the remembrance of the gentle German's fierce glare through his spectacles as he tersely expressed his fatigue.

"Nice Mr. Bruch, I asked him to come to see us," observed Josephine. "He is so homesick and forlorn." After a moment she added: "If only you do make a success of the school, Helen, we shall be all right. Do you think Dr. Latimer will help you?"

"I think so. He gave me his name very willingly."

"What man would n't?" remarked Vernon irrepressibly; "but I think you might have told us before; don't you, Jo? That was two days ago."

Helen smiled, and shook her head, as she proceeded with her winding. "You would n't make that sort of a joke if you had met him."

"Why not? Is he the Beast of the story?"

"Worse and worse," exclaimed Helen with another shake of her smooth, brown head. "He is a man who, if he came in here now, would make you jump off that table instantly."

"Then I hope he won't," put in Josephine, *sotto voce*. "I just saved two glasses the last time."

"Pooh! any man could make me get off the table," replied Vernon to Dr. Latimer's admirer. "You don't suppose I would sit here if company came in, do you? Don't look so mysterious and keep wagging your head that way. You seem to have been impressed. What is he like?"

"Well, he is tall, and rather thin, and has thick gray, wavy hair, and a short brown beard, and his eyes and teeth are the bluest and whitest things I ever saw," returned Helen thoughtfully.

Vernon laughed. "What a description!"

"His lips are firm, and he holds them closed most of the time. His eyes are peculiar. They have this wonderful color, and they look at you so — into you, you know; and there is a stern sort of a line in his forehead. Then he smiles, and — I don't know the effect on other people; but if you are a kindergartner and very anxious to gather a school and afraid you won't — you grow comforted and warm all over when Dr. Latimer smiles."

"You must canvass," declared Josephine practically, her thoughts not having followed Helen's portraiture.

"Yes, I suppose I must," replied Helen, with a catch in her breath. "If only I were not afraid of people. If I looked like you, Jo, and could stalk into a woman's bouse and bend my black

brows upon her, and say majestically: 'Give me your children!' then it would be all right."

"Yes," grumbled Vernon; "but what you *will* do is to hesitate and say, 'I have n't any government, and I'm no kind of a teacher, and I have n't a well-ventilated room, madam, and there is a flight of stairs which I fear is dangerous; but if, under those conditions, you are willing to send your children to me,' etc. You had better let me go. I'm not afraid, and I'll go first to that house across the street. It has such a pleasant look, and there is a little boy there just green enough for you to gather and just ready to your hand."

"Yes, I must try it," admitted Helen. "I saw the lady this morning as I passed."

"I made a discovery to-day," said Josephine, sitting up and looking suddenly interested. "Who do you suppose lives in that house? Miss Norman."

"What Miss Norman?" asked Helen.

"Why, Agnes Norman."

"The pianist?" astonished.

"Yes, indeed. Think of living across the street from her. In the summer time we can hear her play, with the windows open, and perhaps we may become acquainted," added Josephine hopefully. "It will be like having a season ticket to the — club's soirées, and all trouble and expense of full dress saved."

"That is good news," said Helen.

"When you go to see the little boy's mother,"

suggested Vernon, "you can bring in some graceful flattery of Miss Norman, and say we consider ourselves fortunate to live opposite her."

Josephine laughed. "Miss Norman would be overwhelmed with such a compliment; but still, Helen, I would go first to that house. They are likely to be influential people in the neighborhood. Who is that?" added Josephine, as a noise sounded outside. "Somebody is coming upstairs. Oh, dear, how he stumbles. That hall gas ought to be lighted."

She rose as some one knocked, and Vernon slipped from the table and hastened to open the door.

"Why, Mr. Bruch," her sisters heard her say; then she entered, followed by the German teacher, who carried his silk hat in his hand, and beamed upon the girls benevolently through his spectacles as they greeted him.

"I call to see if you have been settled already," he said, "and you excuse me that I make so much noise on your stairs. I could see nothing, and my feet are slippery," looking down at his high-heeled boots.

"It is too bad the gas was not lighted," returned Josephine. "Take off your coat, Mr. Bruch, and sit down in the big chair. It was good of you to hunt us up so soon, and it has been raining, has n't it?"

"Oh, it is a fearful weather!" returned the little man fervently. "It has rained and then it freezes,

and the sidewalks are ice, and the wind it blows, and realla, I — I" — searching frantically for a phrase to express with sufficient force the discomforts of his pilgrimage — "I flew more than I came!"

Vernon suddenly turned her back and rattled the glasses on a corner bracket which did duty for a sideboard.

"I am sure we appreciate your kindness all the more," said Helen. "Don't you think we look cozy here?"

"Almost too cozy," laughed Josephine.

"It is a cheerful home," said the German, looking about the room and nodding. "I wish that I had one, too, and the little ones in it. Yes," nodding sadly, "with the little ones in it."

"Josephine told me you had two children," said Helen gently. "I know you miss them very much."

"Yes, they are far, far away. I shall show her their pictures?" he added, giving an apologetic look at Josephine.

"Yes, indeed, do," replied the latter, encouragingly. "They are pretty little things."

Mr. Bruch brought from an inside pocket a leather case and exhibited two photographs of a boy and girl.

"The boy — he looks like his mother," he explained, as Helen gazed at the little faces and Vernon came to look over her shoulder. "She left me when he came. I look to the day when I have the little ones here."

"Indeed you must."

"They are with their aunt and they are happy. They begin to go to school."

"Show my sister how you follow their movements," suggested Josephine. "It is a very happy thought."

The visitor smiled and took a silver watch from the left pocket of his vest. "This tells me the time in Germana," he said, opening the watch before Helen's eyes. "I look at it and know when the little ones are going to bed, and when they get up, and when they go to school. Here," touching his right side, "is the watch that keeps my time in Boston."

Helen and Josephine exchanged a glance of appreciation.

"That is lovely, Mr. Bruch," said the former, handing back the photographs. "I wish the little ones were here, and that you would let them come to my kindergarten."

"You have one, yes?" said the German, looking up brightly.

"I hope I shall have. I am going to try."

"This will be the place for the little ones, and not our school," he went on, turning to Josephine.

"Yes, indeed," replied the latter, "and when Miss Helen Ivison's academy has become famous, perhaps she will engage Professor Hermann Bruch and Miss Josephine Ivison to teach German and drawing in her establishment. We would bid farewell to the board of education for her sake, would n't we, Mr. Bruch?"

He nodded, smiling. "We come when she wants us," he returned. "I have some private pupils at last, Miss Ivison."

"I am glad to hear it," responded Josephine cordially. "You will get your children the sooner."

"Yes, I am very glad. They come to my room and it saves my time. There is a gentleman out here who they told me would help me, and he does. It is a Dr. Latimer."

"Oh, do you know him?" asked Helen, looking up from the new ball she had commenced. "He is going to help me, too, I think."

"He is a perfect gentleman," declared Mr. Bruch impressively. "While others promise something, he takes trouble for you."

"Well, since Dr. Latimer has made such an impression on you both, it might be well for me to go to him with my quandary," remarked Josephine. "I am anxious to know what to do with my little sister Vernon, Mr. Bruch."

The German gazed at the young girl kindly. "I do not hear that name until I meet your sister," he remarked.

"My name was prepared for a boy," explained Vernon herself. "It was my mother's name before she was married; so when a third girl was born into the family, my father just rang the chestnut bell and gave me the name anyway."

"Mr. Bruch cannot understand your slang," said Josephine with dignified reproof.

"Oh, yes, I understand," replied the visitor, nodding cheerfully. "I know the chestnut bell. Yes, ting-a-ling, I know."

"I wish you would just tell my sister that she does n't need to do anything with me," observed Vernon, who was sitting decorously now, her feet under the table. "In some inexplicable way she has gained the impression that I don't know enough. I have graduated from the high school, too."

"But she is only eighteen, and she ought to study for years yet," said Josephine. "We can't afford to send her to college, so the question is what to do. I am busy all day, and Helen we hope will be" —

"Which proves very clearly that I am needed to keep house," interrupted Vernon with decision.

"Yes, let the young lady stay at home and learn to make soup," said the professor feelingly. "I do not find enough soup in Boston, and my stomach is cold for it."

"Why, I am afraid your landlady does not treat you well," said Josephine smiling. "I think Americans as a rule like soup."

The visitor shook his head with a grimace of disapproval. "When she has it, it is not right. It is much water, and there is not enough salt between it," he replied plaintively.

"I am afraid Helen and I would starve if we permitted Vernon to be our only cook," remarked Josephine. "However, we will see. We will

invite you to take soup with us some day, at any rate, Mr. Bruch."

The professor remained for an hour in this sympathetic atmosphere and then made his adieux. Vernon lighted him down the stairs with a candle, while the other sisters stood at the head of the flight and watched the descent.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, as he stood at last at the door. "Now for those stone steps. I wish that I were down!"

Vernon laughed irrepressibly at the tragical tone. "You should wear overshoes, Mr. Bruch," she said, looking him over from his foreign high heels to the tall silk hat set forward on his "bang," while his thick hair billowed out behind.

He looked up at the other girls. "Miss Vernon laughs at me," he said, "but all the same I shall thank God when I am down."

"We will spread ashes on the steps to-morrow," replied Helen sympathetically, while Vernon held the candle and tried not to giggle at the "Ehs!" and "Ahs!" with which Herr Bruch accomplished the short descent.

The house door closed just as one of the professor's feet flew out unexpectedly. He struggled to regain his balance and plunged into the arms of an approaching pedestrian.

"My dear sir, I thank you; I thank you!" he exclaimed, breathlessly, as a strong arm raised him. "I did not see you; I am fearfulla near-sighted."

"Why, is it Mr. Bruch?" said the other com-

posedly. "It surprises me to find you out in this part of the world."

"Ah, it is you, Mr. Randolph!" The speaker regained his perpendicular. "I am here to visit some ladies who live in that house, but I do not come again until the ice melts."

"Are you going to teach there? I am interested, for I spend at least one evening each week at the house across the street, and we might manage my lesson at the same time."

"No, I do not teach them. It is a lady who gives drawing lessons in the same school with me, and she has permitted that I visit her. I have not many places to go."

"Ah! that is it? Well, good-night, Mr. Bruch."

"Good-night, Mr. Randolph. It is well for me that your arm is strong and your foot is steady. Good-night," and the German professor proceeded with great caution on the way to his horse-car.

CHAPTER III.

MISS NORMAN'S OPPORTUNITY.

THE next morning Josephine returned to her usual occupation in the city, and Helen Ivison, having been fortified by much advice and instruction from Vernon, opened Miss Norman's front gate. Her heart beat very close to her throat as she walked up to the door and rang the bell.

A small boy peeped around the corner of the house and a pug dog ran up to the visitor inquiringly. She looked beyond the pug to the child, who slowly came more and more into sight.

"Is your mamma at home, dear?" she asked softly.

"Have n't got any," replied the boy, staring at her with bright, brown eyes.

Close upon this disconcerting bit of news the front door opened.

"Is the lady of the house at home?" asked Helen, keenly conscious now it was too late that she should have learned the name of the light-haired lady in eyeglasses.

"She is," replied the maid, and a more discouraging tone was never allied to Irish brogue, "but she's busy. I don't think you can see her. Have you any message?"

"I should like to see her very much. I will detain her only a short time," said the visitor, modestly. "If you tell her that I am her neighbor, — that I have just moved into the house across the street, — perhaps she will give me a minute."

The girl hesitated. "Step in," she said at last. Helen gave her her card, and walked unsolicited into the parlor and sat down, remembering Vernon's injunction to be bold.

Thanks to Miss Norman's curiosity, she had not long to wait before that lady, attired in a gray morning dress, entered the room.

Helen rose and met the guarded scrutiny of the other's eyes.

"Pardon me for disturbing you, Mrs." — she hesitated.

"Miss Norman," returned that lady distinctly. "Pray be seated."

With a wave of her hand she sat down, and the girl obediently followed her example.

"My name is Ivison. My sisters and I have recently become your neighbors," she began rather faintly, Vernon would have thought. "I am hoping to start a little school here. I have taken the kindergarten training, and some of my friends thought this would be a good part of the city for me to succeed in, and I called — I called" —

Miss Norman's eyeglasses were regarding her so coldly that courage and breath failed the speaker simultaneously.

"You and your sisters have taken the flat

alone?" asked Miss Norman, after waiting a moment.

"Yes, alone." Had the girl not been chilled by her hostess' manner she would have been glad to go into particulars. As it was, she uttered the two words with difficulty.

"You seem very young. Are you the oldest?"

"No."

"The youngest?"

"No, I am the middle one," replied Helen, meekly. "I am twenty-one, Miss Norman, and I understand my work. Probably you know Dr. Latimer. He has given me permission to refer to him."

"Has he known you — long?"

"No, but I succeeded in satisfying him with my credentials," returned the girl with somewhat less meekness, for Miss Norman's catechism began to rouse her spirit.

The latter lady saw her opportunity to speak a wholesome truth. "I think Dr. Latimer should have told you that three young women of your ages should not attempt to live alone in a strange neighborhood."

"It seems a very nice neighborhood," said poor Helen, astonished and deprecating.

"It has been a particularly nice neighborhood," replied Miss Norman, with impressive significance. Here her small nephew strolled slowly into the room and came and leaned against her, keeping wide, critical eyes upon the caller, who smiled at

him with that spontaneous friendliness she always felt for children.

"It was seeing the little boy in the yard which made me come to you, Miss Norman. I thought possibly you might like to send him to school if there was one close by."

Miss Norman stared at the speaker in evident amazement. The idea that she should be expected to countenance that obnoxious arrangement to the extent of sending her treasure into the care of these presuming intruders was shocking.

"Excuse me, Miss Iverson," she answered, putting a protecting arm around Dickie's small neck. "It is owing to your youth, no doubt, that you are unaware that careful parents and guardians do not send their children to school in a new, damp, brick building, and especially where there is a long and dangerous flight of stairs to be considered."

"It is not very long," faltered Helen blushing, "and I am going to have a gate at the top to make it safe, and the upper flat was so much cheaper!"

The child's wide eyes and ears understood some of the signs of the sweet face and voice.

"Aunt Charlotte, I'm going to her school," he announced stoutly.

"Hush, Dickie," exclaimed his aunt.

Helen rose. "I see, Miss Norman, you do not approve of my undertaking. Excuse me for having taken your time," she said, controlling her voice carefully.

The little boy ran to her and flung his arms up

around her waist. "Don't you want to see my puggy?" he asked.

"Not this morning, dear," she answered hastily, not seeing him very plainly through the gathering mist in her eyes. Then she moved across the room. "Good-morning, Miss Norman."

"Say, I can play the fiddle," persisted the child. "I'll play for you — shall I?"

"Hush, Dickie, that is not at all proper," said Miss Norman severely. "Take your hands off the lady at once."

"But she feels ba—"

"Hush, sh — good-morning, Miss Ivison;" and as Helen closed the house door behind her she heard shrieks and a scuffling sound which told that there was something amiss with Miss Norman's discipline.

Vernon, who had been having a blissful time in the tiny kitchen experimenting with various unwholesome messes designed for her own and her sister's lunch, heard the latter's step on the stair and rushed out into the corridor, beating a tin pan with an iron spoon.

"Hail, the conquering heroine comes!" she cried. Verily it had its compensations that the lower flat had not yet found a tenant, for the youngest Miss Ivison was not a quiet person.

"Did you hook him, dear?" she pursued eagerly. "Lunch is almost ready, and you must eat before you set out again."

Helen did not answer, and Vernon looked at her

first curiously and then anxiously, for she only smiled and walked into the schoolroom with its scanty paraphernalia. There she sat down in the nearest of the dozen little chairs, and covering her face with her hands began to cry.

"What have they done to you, Helen?" asked Vernon, dropping upon her knees and clashing the pan and spoon together, this time unintentionally, as they met around her sister in a fervent embrace.

"Oh, Miss — Miss Norman" — gasped Helen.

"Was it she?" exclaimed Vernon. "Then I would n't go to hear her play if she was the last musician on earth."

"No, not the — the piano one. Wait a — minute."

Vernon's big blue eyes were bright with sympathetic feeling. She looked ready to attack anybody who could hurt her gentle, beloved sister.

At last Helen was able to speak. "The light-haired lady who I thought was the little boy's mother is Miss Norman too, and she was so discouraging. She evidently thinks very poorly of us because we live here alone, and she says the house is too damp yet to be safe for a school, and *she* spoke of the stairs, — I did n't. She said they were n't safe either, and she looked at me in such a cold way" —

Poor Helen began to cry again, and her sister's eyes blazed blue as she hugged her. Vernon had n't much to give in the way of consolation beside hugs and kisses, but she gave those lavishly.

"You're too tender-hearted, Helen," she declared. "You ought to have defied that woman and made her feel that all she said slipped off you like water off a duck's back. I hope you did n't cry before her?"

"Of course I did n't," began the other indignantly; "but I came very near it," she added brokenly. "O Vernon! I'm such a horrid kind of a person. Josephine is strong and firm, and you are young now, yet you have lots of character and you will come out all right; but I am contemptible middling, just as I came between you two in age and in the color of my hair, and I know I'll always be a failure and a drawback."

Vernon was greatly disturbed by this outburst, which was astonishing indeed from the unselfish and even-tempered Helen.

"My dear girl, you're all tired out with the moving," said the younger sister tenderly. "You're talking wildly. There is n't a day passes but that I remember to be grateful that you are just what you are. I can't live up to Josephine long at a time; don't you know that? Her ways and her standards are all natural enough to her, but they are not to me; and I tell you," added Vernon, feelingly, while the iron spoon clapped her sister between the shoulder-blades, "this world would be a good deal harder place than it is if it were not for contemptible middling people."

Helen gave a faint smile. This was certainly comforting.

"A better name for them," continued Vernon, "is ordinary mortals. Give me ordinary mortals. I like them."

"I hope you are not being disloyal to Josephine."

"I hope not, too."

"She is what holds us together," said Helen. "We should be all afloat and helpless without Josephine. Such a gifted being as she is! Think what an artist she might be if circumstances permitted her to study," she added, with devout faith, "yet how patiently she goes her round of teaching for the good of us all. I am afraid you don't appreciate Josephine."

"Yes, I do, perfectly. I'm only saying she is a being a little too bright and good for human nature's daily food. Speaking of food," — Vernon rose from her kneeling posture, — "you must have some. Oh, horrors!" with sudden recollection. "My cake will be burned!"

She flew to the kitchen, opened the oven of the little oil stove, and beheld the catastrophe!

Helen did not exult openly in the fact that there would be one less test to inflict upon her power of digestion, but praised the luncheon that her sister served to her across the little table, an important feature of which was a plate of molasses taffy.

"Are you going out again?" asked Vernon doubtfully, when they had finished.

"I suppose I must," answered Helen, swallow-

ing a sigh with a last bit of bread. "Perhaps I might venture to disturb Dr. Latimer once more, and get from him the suggestion of a few places to try."

It is often the case that speaking of a person seems to invoke him, and now a step on the staircase was heard, and Vernon, answering the knock at the door, was confronted by a tall man who removed his hat and said:—

"Is Miss Helen Ivison at home?"

The deep-blue eyes, the thin lips, and the short, waving gray hair, — above all, the visitor's manner and restful, slow speech, made Vernon certain at once of the identity of the guest.

She colored with pleasure and embarrassment. "Yes, sir. I'm sorry I have n't any nice place to ask you into," — leading the way into the school-room, — "but we have only just finished lunch and — I'll bring you a chair big enough to sit down in, in one minute."

She hurried into the dining-room. "Dr. Latimer!" she announced to her sister, and began tugging excitedly at the one easy-chair their *ménage* boasted.

"That won't go through the door easily, Vernon," said Helen. "I will take one of these."

Dr. Latimer met and greeted her with quiet cordiality as he took the chair from her hand.

"How do you do, Miss Ivison? What a pleasant, sunshiny room you have here!"

That was all he said, in his deliberate, unemphatic

way, but for some reason the burden of responsibility and apprehension lifted from the girl's heart, and suddenly Miss Norman's opinions became individual only, and not the voice of the neighborhood.

"Yes, I thought we were fortunate to find a southern exposure," replied Helen. "This is my sister Vernon, Dr. Latimer."

The visitor shook hands with the young girl, and said with a smile that he was glad to see her.

Vernon smiled, too, and gazed wistfully into his eyes, and, marvelous to relate, had nothing to say. She felt modest and insignificant and conscious of a fervent wish that she were all that those wonderful eyes seemed to think she might be.

Dr. Latimer placed the chair Helen had offered, and as he seated himself the girls took two of the little chairs and looked up at him.

"I came to bring the addresses of a few friends who I found were interested in your plan," he said, addressing Helen. "I rather think, from what the mothers say, you will have some success at once. There seems to be, as you thought, a field for your work here."

The effect of modesty in Dr. Latimer's quiet manner was heightened by a changing color which at times came and went in his face as he talked. One might almost have thought him shy but for the steady, penetrating gaze of his eyes.

"I thank you so much," returned Helen gratefully, the hopeful light growing in her expression.

"Your neighbor across the street, Miss Norman, has a little nephew to bring up; she is an old friend of mine. I just stepped in to see her, but she had gone out."

Helen and Vernon exchanged one involuntary look, the former conveying a warning in her glance. It was proof of Vernon's subdued state that Helen was permitted to speak uninterruptedly.

"I have seen her, Dr. Latimer, and I find she does not care to send the little boy to me."

The visitor looked thoughtful. "That surprises me," he answered at last. "I felt sure of that one pupil for you. She is so careful of Dickie she will not send him far from home, so has taught him herself. I thought she would hail this opportunity."

Helen smiled. What a change an hour had wrought in her feelings since she could perceive a humorous aspect to her interview with her neighbor!

"She does n't hail it at all," she answered, and Vernon's eyes began to sparkle so ominously that Helen slightly shook her head.

"Perhaps she does not quite understand," suggested the visitor. "I will see her."

"Thank you very much, but please don't," said Helen firmly. "Miss Norman was very decided, and I should be very sorry to have her urged."

It was not in Vernon's flesh and blood, or spirit either, to remain dumb another moment.

"We don't want the child!" she burst forth, with a curtness very far removed from her sister's manner.

The visitor regarded her questioningly, and she blushed.

"Miss Norman hurt Helen's feelings inexcusably," she went on stoutly. "Helen does n't want me to talk about it, and so I won't."

"I am sorry to have Vernon mention it," said Helen, distressed, "for Miss Norman is your friend. Really, it is of very little consequence."

Dr. Latimer made no comment, but took from an inside pocket a short list of addresses.

"I hope you will succeed with these people," he said. "You will find yourself heralded. Is the flat pretty comfortable?"

"Yes, we shall get on very well, though this is the only room of any size. Three people should not require much space, and it is a pleasantly independent life after boarding."

"You have a third sister?"

"Yes, she is away all day. She is a drawing teacher."

"About your age?"

"Josephine is twenty-four and I am twenty-one."

"Yes," Dr. Latimer nodded. "I hope pleasant people will move in downstairs."

Helen smiled doubtfully. "We think it is pretty nice to have the whole house to ourselves."

"You are not lonely?"

"Not at all," replied Helen, surprised; then added anxiously: "You think it is all right for us to live so in this quiet neighborhood?"

Dr. Latimer recalled some disapproving remarks of Miss Norman's apropos of the girls' independence. "Yes, I think you had good reasons for making the experiment, and I hope events will justify you," he answered; each quiet, carefully weighed word carrying a value which few everyday speeches bear

When the visitor had gone, Vernon and Helen looked at one another.

"What a beautiful man," said the former slowly. "Even the schoolroom amounts to more because he has sat in it. Oh," — with a quick sigh, — "I don't believe I shall do anything loud all day. "Would n't"— with sudden reflection — would n't Josephine admire him!"

"There," smiled Helen, "does n't that help you to rate Josephine at her real worth?"

"Pooh!" exclaimed Vernon, with quick defiance, "I admire him just as much as Josephine will."

CHAPTER IV.

A BONE OF CONTENTION.

HIS interview with the Ivison girls gave Dr. Latimer a reason for making a call a few evenings afterward at the Normans.

The scene upon which he came as he entered their sitting-room was a familiar one. The usual fire burned upon the hearth, Miss Charlotte sat near the centre-table, upon which shone the usual lamp, and the usual bit of sewing was in her lap.

"You have Agnes, too, to-night," he said, looking across, as he shook hands with the elder sister, at a woman who rose from an easy-chair placed near the fire.

"Yes; this is one of my nights off," said the latter, coming forward and cordially offering her hand. "I am glad you happened to choose it, for your visits have not been numerous of late."

Agnes Norman's voice was musical, and she had the graceful, self-posessed bearing of an accomplished and successful woman. Her careful dressing and a charm of manner which everybody felt stood her in good stead of beauty and assisted to make her great professional popularity.

"The off nights will come oftener now," she

continued, indicating a seat for the guest near her own. "It is growing late in the season. I begin to dream dreams of the summer, Doctor; do you, too?"

Dr. Latimer replied at first only with the smiling silence which was so important a part of what he said. "I sometimes suspect that I am a dreamer of those dreams the whole winter long," he answered at last.

"It would be honest of me to confess to that, too," said Agnes. "Right in the midst of giving a lesson, oftentimes, the picture of our little parlor rises before me quite spontaneously, and I hear the swish of the waves through the playing of my pupil, and a warm, exultant sense of possession comes over me, quite different from any sensation which I ever feel for this dear old home. How do you explain such disloyalty to the place of my birth, Charlotte?"

"Easily enough," returned her sister placidly, continuing her sewing. "You can't get away from people here, and there you can. I dare say that fact is at the bottom of the doctor's affection for the island, too. Is n't it, Doctor?"

"It is a great consideration," admitted the visitor. "When we feel that our forces have run low, that little spot in Casco Bay is a good place in which to gather a new supply. I feel grateful to you for letting me in."

Miss Norman laughed. "We don't own the whole place," she protested.

"What place is that?" asked a masculine voice with languid interest, as a new-comer pushed aside the portière and entered the room. "How do you do, Aunt Charlotte, Aunt Agnes? Good-evening, Dr. Latimer."

"How do you do, Olin?" Miss Norman gave her greeting rather severely. Her nephew's manner was too off-hand to please her. There was no one in the world, and there never had been any one, not even Agnes, whom she admired so fervently as she did this athletic-looking man, but there were many, many points about him which she did not approve. "I was saying to the doctor," she added, with the same tinge of severity, "that your Aunt Agnes and myself do not own the whole of the island."

"The — island. *The* — island," repeated the young man, sinking into a corner of the sofa, stretching his long legs and crossing his feet in one of the postures which Miss Norman often declared he would not indulge, could she have superintended the bringing up of her eldest nephew as she was doing that of her youngest.

"Heretic!" said Agnes. "Beware! You should know by this time that there is but one island."

"Is it true, Dr. Latimer," continued the young man with his customary drawl, "that two summers down there have not been enough for you?"

"I cannot imagine tiring of it," answered the doctor. "Your aunts, you see, have been going for many years, and only love the place the better."

"Ye-es; but Aunt Agnes is a misanthrope and a recluse by nature, and Aunt Charlotte enjoys playing philanthropist among the natives."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the latter indignantly. "I should think you knew the islanders better than to suppose that anybody can patronize them."

"Well, I will modify my statement. Aunt Charlotte loves popularity, and she is immensely popular at the island."

"That is a fact, as I can testify," said the doctor. "I judge you do not intend to pass your own vacation there, Olin."

"Not if I can help it."

"Which you can easily do, my dear," remarked Agnes, smiling. "What made you suppose we would have you?"

Her nephew squared his shoulders, threw his head back, and regarded the ceiling. "We can only judge of the future by the past," he returned equably.

"You used to be glad enough to come," remarked Miss Charlotte reproachfully.

"Ye-es, but there is nothing entertaining to me now in the gait of a lobster. In fact, it is objectionable. Now, for Dickie" —

"Oh, it is just heaven for Dickie," exclaimed Miss Charlotte. "Why did n't you come earlier, Olin? Dickie has gone to bed now."

"That is quite as it should be," responded her elder nephew. "The last few times I interviewed my cousin he proved himself to have such an affir-

ity for real estate carried about on the person, preferably the hands, that I feel as though I could support the loss of his society until he shall have evolved into a more esthetic stage of existence."

"Now, Olin Randolph," — Miss Norman dropped her sewing, — "no woman in this world can keep a boy of Dickie's age clean all the time. It is simply impossible. You know, Dr. Latimer, how active that child is, running about like a bit of quicksilver, and of course getting himself soiled. I console myself with the idea that dirt is healthful."

"I think it would make life happier for Dickie," replied Dr. Latimer, seeing his opportunity, "if he were to go to school."

"Yes, indeed, so it would, if the right sort of one was accessible," answered Miss Charlotte. Then some thought altered her expression. "That reminds me," she added, "a young woman came here a few days ago using your name, Dr. Latimer, and I meant to tell you the first time we met; for I can't think you intended to allow a stranger situated as she is to go about inducing people to listen to her on your account. I don't believe I even told you, Agnes, for it was that very night you played at Brookline; but the girls who have moved into those disgusting flats are going to open a school, and they wanted Dickie."

"Wanted Dickie! Misguided young women," murmured Mr. Randolph.

"I understand that you refused," said Dr. Latimer.

Miss Norman gave a short laugh as she twitched her needle energetically. "Certainly I did. It is bad enough to have such a school exist, without swelling its numbers with our own child."

"I don't understand your state of mind," said the doctor. "If the school should fail, it would not be the means of removing the building which is such a trial to you."

"Poor Charlotte!" Agnes smiled at the fire. "The world has been hollow ever since the scheme of that house developed. I am glad you did n't design it, Olin. To have had it proved that you were the architect would have added the last bitter drop to your Aunt Charlotte's cup."

"Bitter, indeed," remarked Mr. Randolph. "You are kind to suggest that I might have designed such a dismally ugly box."

"No, Dr. Latimer," replied Miss Norman firmly, disregarding this by-play, "it would not remove the building, but it might be the means of removing those young women to some place more suitable for three girls who are quite alone."

"That seemed to me to be their misfortune, and not their fault," suggested the doctor.

Miss Charlotte nodded. "So it is; but they are old enough, in my opinion — at least, the black-haired one is; yes, and the brown haired one, too — to know better than to attempt such a way of living. The blonde one with the turn-up nose, especially, needs a controlling hand."

A little pause followed; then Dr. Latimer said:

"They have not been wholly self-supporting up to now, but the uncle on whom they partly leaned seems to have awakened them to a sharp necessity for becoming so. This plan was suggested and adopted. Miss Helen, the teacher, interested me very much in the talk we had together. She is well recommended."

"Then it is with your authority," returned Miss Norman curtly, "that she uses your name so confidently. I could not believe it."

"I am sorry you did not, if it would have affected you to make a favorable reply regarding Dickie."

Miss Norman looked at the speaker in reproachful surprise. "You a doctor, and advise me to let my child go into that new, damp, brick house?"

The visitor smiled. "Time flies fast, Miss Charlotte. You forget the length of time that house has waited for a tenant."

"I don't trust new brick houses, and I object very much indeed to that flight of stairs."

"I should think you were making a mistake not to take Dr. Latimer's advice," hazarded Agnes. "It seems just the chance for Dickie."

"You have n't considered the situation at all," remarked her sister with some sharpness; "and Dr. Latimer is a man, and his sympathies have been practiced upon by that girl; and — and — I only hope he won't repent of it," finished Miss Norman in a tone which conveyed a meaning directly opposed to her words.

"Query," remarked Mr. Randolph speculatively. "Is it the black-haired one, or the brown-haired one, or the blonde with the turn-up nose, who teaches drawing?"

"It is the eldest," said Dr. Latimer.

Miss Norman gave her nephew an astonished glance. "How do you know about them?" she inquired.

"Another of Dr. Latimer's protégés informed me the other evening. Bruch, you know, doctor. He had just been calling upon them when we met."

"Well, I do not know," said Miss Charlotte irritably.

"He is my German teacher, and the eldest teaches in the same school with him and had invited him to call. That is all I know about it, Aunt Charlotte, or I would gladly tell you more."

"H'm," replied Miss Norman in a tone that spoke volumes. "Don't talk to me," and she went on with her sewing.

The color fluctuated in Dr. Latimer's cheeks. He had known Charlotte Norman all his life. Her brother had been his best friend. He knew her to be as good as she was narrow, and he knew this capricious, strong prejudice she had taken might be a mighty force working against the success of Helen Ivison's little venture.

"I am disappointed," he said at last, in his gently distinct and forceful way. "I have always counted on you, Miss Charlotte, for every good word and work, and I counted on you in this in-

stance. These girls are alone, but they would not be so if you took them up. They are poor, but your friendship and backing would bring them comfort and add to their financial success. If they do not appeal to your own good offices, let me remind you that in speaking of them to people you can harm or help them, and I cannot believe that after the expense and effort they have been at — very great for them — you would really force them to go away."

Neither could Miss Norman quite believe it, hearing the fact stated in the doctor's voice. She murmured something indistinct as she sewed faster than before.

He waited a moment before proceeding.

"I have not met the eldest sister yet, but the other two seem good and modest girls. It is impossible for us to refuse to believe them so until they prove otherwise."

"Why, do you know, Charlotte, I like the sound of those girls," remarked Agnes. "Surely it is not the fact of their being working-women that makes you object to them as neighbors, since your own sister is one?"

"Now, is n't that just like you, Agnes!" exclaimed Miss Norman, glad to give vent to her excitement and irritation. "To compare an artist like yourself to nobodies like those girls!"

"The wise teacher of a kindergarten," said Dr. Latimer, "is doing an angel's work on earth. Think it over, Miss Charlotte, and if Miss Ivison proves successful you will admit that she is some-

body, and that a place where little children are gathered and instructed is not a bad thing to have across the way. I must say good-night now." The speaker rose and Miss Norman rose also, holding her work clasped to her by one hand, while she gave the other to Dr. Latimer. His expression was serenely unchanged, but Miss Norman felt uneasy, and when the visitor had taken his departure her voice showed it as she spoke: —

"Now I have offended Dr. Latimer, I suppose."

"Indeed, you have not," remarked Agnes. "He is the most impersonal being I ever knew. People never offend him in the ordinary sense of the word. I have wondered at it, but I think they can't get up where he is."

"I don't know what you mean by that, but I do know that, good as he is, he can't dictate to me about Dickie's education. That is a matter I must decide for myself."

"I'm sorry I have no time to find those girls out," said Agnes, "since Dr. Latimer takes such an interest in them. However, that is probably the very reason why they do not need me."

"Make me your proxy," suggested Mr. Randolph. "I will make a study of them in turn if you like, — the black-haired one, the brown-haired one, and the one with the turn-up nose."

"If you think that is funny, Olin, you are much mistaken," returned Miss Charlotte hotly; "and now I request as a personal favor that you and your aunt will discover a new topic of conversation. That one is offensive to me."

CHAPTER V.

JOSEPHINE'S TRIUMPH.

IN spite of Miss Norman's disapproval, Miss Iverson's kindergarten was soon started, and, irritating as the subject was, Miss Charlotte found it impossible to dismiss it peremptorily, since Dickie was filled with eager longing for the mysterious joys in that upper room across the street. He could see the children march and countermarch before the windows. He could hear them sing "Little White Feathers" and kindred ditties. At intervals they came out of doors into the rough vacant lot beside the house, and with them a young girl, who led their plays and joined in them with zest. The little boy grew more discontented every day. Puggy barked and curled his tail and frolicked about in a manner surprisingly energetic, but Dickie was no longer satisfied with him for a playfellow.

Finding his aunt firm and even severe in her refusal of his pleading to be allowed to enter the neighboring paradise, the boy ceased coaxing, but, in the unconscious manner of childhood, became more urgent in actions which spoke louder than words.

Bursts of merry laughter from across the street

brought Miss Norman stealthily to the window one morning to look for Dickie, kept within the gate by her mandate. There he stood, his hands in his pockets, while he watched the progress of the games with big, sad eyes. Miss Charlotte knew exactly their expression, though the back of his head was toward her. They were so like the eyes of her sister, the youngest and the pet of the family, who had died when this child was born. No wonder it gave her a pang to see them clouded. As Miss Norman gazed she had to make an effort to steel her heart, for the attitude of the little figure, with the red scarf around its neck and the plump legs so wonderfully quiet, smote her heart. She saw that Puggy worked in vain to break the spell, and at last quieted down and evidently fell into his master's mood, for his tail uncurled and he brought his flat face close to the gate, apparently watching with equal interest the proceedings across the street.

Miss Norman had to own reluctantly that the big girl who led the games showed to advantage in her present position, despite the facts of her flushed face and soft, disordered hair, and she gazed with growing interest at the pretty scene. When a boy as large as Dickie flung himself at Vernon, and, with the activity of a monkey, threw his strong little arms around her shoulders and his legs about her waist, Miss Charlotte uttered an audible "oh" of sympathy with the strain which she supposed the girl to be enduring. But Vernon stood un-

moved as a monument, and only laughed into the mischievous face before gently pushing the boy down and starting another game. Those children were having a hilariously good time, while Dickie—

Miss Norman left the window determinedly and returned to her sewing. She had not yet been able to forget her nephew's eloquent silence, however, when Dickie broke into the room, his excited little face a-beam with delight.

"Oh, auntie, the lady has asked me to come over and play with 'em," he cried eagerly.

"What lady?" asked Miss Norman, instinctively trying to gain time.

"The lady that plays with 'em. Can I go?" The short legs danced with impatience.

"No, you cannot." Miss Charlotte felt that her only hope was in retaining an attitude of decision; but her heart sank within her when her nephew fell prone on the floor, and in loud wails gave utterance to such poignant disappointment as can fill the six-year-old breast.

"It would n't be proper—listen to auntie—hush, Dickie," said Miss Charlotte, in the pauses during which he held his breath.

She endeavored to explain to her nephew that if he did not work with those children it followed that he must not play with them. Her logic upheld her with somewhat less discomfort in her own position, but, as might have been expected, did not affect Dickie, sobbing his heart out on the floor in an abandonment of woe.

At last Miss Norman was obliged to cease her efforts and, shaking her head in despair, to retreat from the coaxing position in which she had been leaning over the child, and, resuming her chair near the open fire, to go on sewing, not much more comfortable, as a matter of fact, than the small boy on the floor. As a usual thing she possessed plenty of moral courage to deny Dickie when the course of duty compelled, but in this instance she was dismally uncertain as to her ground. Her conscience informed her that her own willfulness was at the bottom of this ear-splitting, heart-breaking discord, and she dearly loved this little child. So she went on thinking and Dickie went on crying, and the little boy found relief first, for throats tire sooner than brains.

This scene was the beginning of the end, for Miss Norman was a conscientious woman, and the conflict in her mind could have but one outcome. It was one Saturday that she at last took her determination and wrote a note which she sent across the street by her maid. The note read thus : —

MISS IVISON, — If you will call at my house once more I should like to talk with you further regarding your school. I may wish my nephew to attend after all. Yours sincerely,

CHARLOTTE NORMAN.

The three sisters were spending the holiday very contentedly together at home when this note was handed in.

Being addressed simply to Miss Ivison, Josephine read it first and then handed it to her sisters, who put their heads together over it.

"There!" exclaimed Vernon, "that poor little boy has teased her until she has had to come around."

Helen only smiled. Josephine, who had already received a dramatic version at second hand of her sister's interview with Miss Norman, raised the fine black curves of her eyebrows with a lofty expression. Vernon alone seemed inclined to put her emotions into words.

"If I ever pitied a child, that Norman boy is the one," she remarked emphatically. "Penned up there all day with that old maid" —

"Don't use that expression," interrupted Josephine. "We shall not like it when we are fifty."

"Nor deserve it, probably," returned Vernon hopefully; "but if I do not marry I am going to make it a point to be the sweetest old maid that ever was seen. Anyway, it would move a heart of stone to see Dickie gaze through the bars of his prison, and it evidently has done so."

"I am afraid I exaggerated Miss Norman's terrors," said Helen, "for you to feel that way."

"She was spiteful to you, Helen," declared Josephine. "It is late for you to apologize for her now."

"I must say I dread to go to see her again," admitted Helen, "she hurt my feelings so; but then they were on the surface in those days, in every-

body's way, where they could get hurt easily. Now that the school is really a fact and successful, I should n't be such a baby."

"You need not go," said Josephine decidedly.

"Oh, I must take some notice of the note."

"The note was to Miss Ivison. I have n't many rights in this *ménage*, I know, but you can't deny that at least I am Miss Ivison," returned the older sister, smiling. "I will go to see Miss Norman myself."

Josephine did not waste smiles. She took life rather seriously, as she had been forced to do, for the girls' orphaned condition had been somewhat bitter, owing to the grudging attitude of the uncle to whom Dr. Latimer had referred. Now when she smiled and announced her intention, Vernon looked at her admiringly, and exulted, as she did on rare occasions, that they had a Josephine, strong, assured, and handsome, whom nobody could snub or ignore.

"Good for you, Jo!" she exclaimed. "I would have gone myself rather than let Helen," and she passed a caressing hand over the latter's shoulder.

"But what are you going to say, Josephine?" asked Helen rather doubtfully.

"I will say the right thing, never fear."

"Well, but when are you going?" for Josephine showed no sign of ceasing her occupation of clearing out a bureau drawer which had waited until now for its time to be unpacked. "It is nearly five o'clock."

"Helen," — Josephine regarded her sister with accusing eyes, — "you know you are yearning for Dickie."

"Well, what if I am?" defiantly.

"Just this, — that you had better stop it immediately, you insatiable baby-lover."

"Why? Do you believe Miss Norman won't send him, after all?" asked the young teacher.

"I will go to see her this evening," replied Josephine evasively, proceeding with her sorting.

Miss Norman's small nephew had been put to bed that night happy in the promise of kindergarten Monday morning. Her large nephew, after dining with her, had said good-night, in order to go to meet his Aunt Agnes by appointment in the city. He put on his overcoat and hat, and opened the front door, when he was confronted by a girl standing on the upper step, evidently about to ring the bell.

They regarded each other in silence a second; then the girl spoke: —

"Can you tell me if Miss Norman is at home?"

Mr. Randolph took off his hat.

"She is. Will you walk in?"

"I am sorry to trouble you," said the girl, stepping into the hall and speaking with entire self-possession. "Would you oblige me by telling her that Miss Ivison would like to speak with her?"

"The black-haired one," thought Mr. Randolph, as every feature and tint of Josephine's proudly carried head impressed itself upon him under the hall light.

"Miss Norman is right here in the parlor," he replied. "Let me take you to her."

His aunt had during dinner been giving him an account of her trials with Dickie and of her final capitulation. She had spoken patronizingly of Helen and her school, and attached considerable weight to the assistance her countenance and support would give to the strangers, explaining at the same time that it was under protest she gave it, as her opinion regarding the action of these young girls in taking up an unprotected life in that odious house still remained unchanged. She had observed, however, that, probably owing to Dr. Latimer's exertions, the children of several of the select of the neighborhood were attending Miss Iverson's school and that therefore she hoped — with a deep and heavy sigh — that Dickie might escape contamination.

Such being the tenor of Miss Norman's confidences, Mr. Randolph was the more surprised to discover in the apparition which had confronted him at this hour one of his aunt's obnoxious neighbors. Josephine, unexpected and novel, was always impressive. Josephine discovered at Miss Norman's door alone in the evening, by a man whose involuntary gaze of curiosity colored her richly, was dazzling. He whose indifferent nature was not an affectation was suddenly possessed by wonder as to how Aunt Charlotte would be able to patronize this tall young woman.

Ushering the girl into the parlor, he stood a mo-

ment while Miss Norman rose surprised from her chair. He saw at once that the visitor was unexpected, and he saw too that his aunt was wholly unconscious of his presence; so, deprived of an excuse for lingering, he passed beyond the portière into an adjoining room.

"I—a—is this—a"—hesitated Miss Charlotte.

"Miss Ivison, yes," said Josephine pleasantly. "You wrote me or my sister a note, I think, Miss Norman."

Her business-like, though gracious manner held a demand, and her hostess, unaccountably embarrassed, offered her the only thing she could think of,—namely, a chair.

"Won't you be seated, Miss Ivison?" Miss Ivison accepted with self-possession. "It was your sister I addressed on the subject of her school," replied Miss Norman, recovering herself and recalling the relative positions of herself and this young person, who, now that she looked at her with more deliberation, she saw was really quite young and not at all startling.

Josephine bowed slightly. "I have come in response to that note," she remarked, and then looked at her hostess with calm, polite inquiry, which left the latter no alternative but to take the initiative. She had pictured gentle Helen meeting her more than half-way, and had counted on her gratitude as a very pleasant feature of their interview. She did not like this exchange.

"I have a little nephew," she began somewhat

stiffly, after a moment's hesitation, "whom I think of placing in your sister's school. I should like to ask," she added, after a moment's waiting for Josephine, who continued mutely and politely attentive, "if you find the house quite dry."

"Quite dry," echoed Josephine.

"Has your sister seen to placing a gate at the head of the stairs?"

"No; she has not," replied the girl suavely.

Miss Norman stared and waited for an apology, but none was added.

"My little nephew," she began in a stately manner, and then hesitated.

"Ah, is he weak — is he — backward?" asked the visitor, with significant and sympathetic pauses.

Olin, barefacedly eavesdropping in the next room, came near betraying himself.

"Not at all," exclaimed Miss Norman, flushing. "He is an exceptionally bright child."

"Ah, I have seen the little boy about, and I thought from your speaking of the gate — the children who come to my sister have not been young enough to make a gate necessary."

"There is always danger," said Miss Norman, still heated, "of children falling downstairs when there are a lot of them playing together."

"My sister's scholars are quite carefully watched, and I think they are not in danger."

"You ought to have taken the lower flat," said Miss Charlotte. She had thought so much criticism of these girls that it made it possible to speak

out even to this one whom she had seen only from a distance on her daily walk to the street car.

"You have kept a school, then?" asked Josephine with gentle interest, the soft velvet of her dark eyes becoming luminous with sparkling light.

"Not at all, but I have common-sense," responded Miss Norman, then suddenly became conscious of her inexcusable rudeness. "That sounds very brusque," she added quickly. "I only mean — I only" —

She stammered because Josephine rose. "Yes, I understand," answered the visitor calmly. "When we move into the lower flat you will, perhaps, want to send your nephew to us."

"Oh! wait a moment, Miss Ivison; wait a moment," said Miss Norman firmly. "In consideration of your sister's caution and regard for the children, I am not sure that I shall not send him as it is."

The girl regarded her. "No, indeed, it is really fortunate that you do not care particularly about it."

"Why, I do care," replied Miss Norman, making the admission reluctantly. Somehow her attitude was not what she had intended, but it would never do to have this interview terminate otherwise than she had planned, however disagreeable the means by which such termination was brought about. "I do care, and I think I shall bring Dickie Monday morning."

Well she knew that if for any reason she should fail to bring Dickie Monday morning, there was no

house in that region which would be adequate to hold that young gentleman and his variety of emotions.

"It really would not be worth your while, for my sister has not room for him," replied Josephine with composure.

Miss Norman looked aghast. "Oh, she can make room for one little child," she said.

Josephine shook her head gently but firmly. "It is impossible, Miss Norman. I came to-night to tell you so, but from your objections to our arrangements I supposed that I had made a mistake in thinking you cared to send the little boy."

"I do want to send him," Miss Norman made haste to confess. "The fact is, he wishes very much to go."

"Ah, that is unfortunate," remarked Josephine, beginning to move toward the door.

Miss Norman yielded to the hopeless downfall of the position she had been desirous to maintain. "Please wait a moment, Miss Ivison," she said with unconcealed anxiety. A dread of the small despot above stairs was upon her. "I can't believe it is quite impossible for your sister to oblige me. Is her school full so soon?"

"She has had quite unexpected success," returned Josephine. "In fact, some of the parents have told her that the most effectual punishment they can give their children is to keep them at home for a day."

Miss Norman recalled the games, music, and

laughter, and the silent, longing figure, so long barred in and now barred out. She had no bribe to offer this self-sufficient and self-possessed young woman. The day when her patronage would have been of service had passed.

"I wish," she said in a tone which edified the shameless and appreciative listener in the next room, "that you would persuade your sister to consider again, and see if she cannot receive Dickie. Dr. Latimer has been here this evening, — he went out just before you came in; I think you must have met him, — and when I told him I meant to send my child to your sister he did not hint a doubt but that there would be room for him."

Josephine smiled upon her hostess with unmoved graciousness. "Since you desire it so much, Miss Norman, it is a pity you did not send the little boy some time ago. As it is, I will speak to my sister, if you like, and she will put your name down as an applicant for the first vacancy. Will that do?"

"Well, it won't *do*, really, Miss Ivison, but if after you talk with your sister you find she cannot do any better, of course I shall have to put up with it."

Miss Norman's troubled anxiety of manner failed to move the imperturbable calm with which her visitor took her leave, and when the house door closed behind her the troubled lady even forgot to be offended with Olin, who immediately appeared from his place of concealment.

"Why did n't you introduce me?" he demanded with his usual nonchalance.

"Introduce you?" repeated his aunt, looking up and becoming conscious of him. "I never thought of such a thing. Have you been in there all this time?"

"Of course. I stood on one foot and then on the other until that would n't do any longer, then I retreated."

"Then you heard what Miss Ivison said," remarked Miss Charlotte disconsolately.

"I heard what you both said."

"Yes, I suppose so," returned the other, with no suspicion of his amusement. "What shall I do with Dickie! I am so glad you are coming back here to spend the night. You will talk to him in the morning, won't you, Olin? You see, I promised him he should go to school, never dreaming of any obstacle. You talk to him and tell him it is only put off — that he shall go soon — and persuade him to be patient. He will take it better from you than from me."

Poor Miss Charlotte! Conscience makes cowards of us all.

Meanwhile, Josephine had picked her triumphant way across the street and ascended the stairs.

Outside the door she paused, for she heard a man's voice. Entering the little sitting-room, her eyes dancing with light and her cheeks pinkly flushed, she was welcomed by Helen in a tone of satisfaction: —

"Here is my sister, Dr. Latimer."

The visitor rose from the easy-chair in the corner,

and Josephine saw for the first time her sister's much-quoted friend.

"I am glad to see you," he said, with a steady look into the girl's eyes; and Josephine discovered that the commonplace phrase has a meaning. "Miss Helen tells me you have been calling on Miss Norman," he added, as he resumed his seat. "We passed one another on the road, evidently."

"Yes, I have just come from there," answered the girl, removing her jacket and hat.

"And did you make an arrangement for the little boy?"

"That was impossible, Dr. Latimer; Helen has no room for him."

"Indeed!" said the doctor, turning his radiant glance upon Helen, who was suddenly looking unaccountably anxious. "I congratulate you, Miss Helen, although I am sorry for Dickie."

"I want to thank you, Dr. Latimer," Josephine hastened to say in her low clear voice. "I have had no opportunity before to thank you for the invaluable aid you have given us."

"The true explanation of Miss Helen's success," answered the visitor, "is that you came here and made your venture at the right moment." The speaker's thoughtful, gentle speech was not soothing, rather exciting, to Josephine, who hurried on.

"I happen always to have heard of you as helping people out of quandaries," she said, "and I have had designs upon some of your time myself. I wanted to talk to you about Vernon."

Dr. Latimer looked around at the young girl, who was sitting demurely on the other side of the table, and gave her a smile, which Josephine instantly envied her. "I felt that she should be studying, yet I didn't feel capable of guiding her. Now, however, she seems to fit in so well as an assistant to Helen that I don't know but that she may as well become a kindergartner, too."

Dr. Latimer nodded. "It is a noble work," he replied, and Josephine suddenly detested the teaching of drawing and longed to join Helen's goodly company.

Vernon said nothing, and only looked with large, docile eyes from her sister to their visitor and back again.

"I dare say it will come to that," said Josephine, "and meanwhile Vernon has her German with us all. Mr. Bruch is so kind. He insists that one evening a week with us will be a pleasure to him, and so we have the benefit of lessons."

"Mr. Bruch is the man with the two watches," returned Dr. Latimer, after the moment of silence which his interlocutors always accorded him. "There is a good deal of poetry and pathos in those two watches."

"There is," replied Josephine, for the visitor looked at her now.

They had some talk about Germans, especially Froebel, and then Dr. Latimer shook hands with them all and went away.

When he had left, the three girls looked at each

other. Vernon stretched her arms as though after unwonted restraint.

"After Dr. Latimer has gone I always feel like talking loud and telling lies," she remarked sententiously.

Josephine regarded her, her face wearing an excited, uneasy expression. "I feel as though I had talked loud and had told lies," she said curtly.

"How could you?" asked Helen, who had been gazing wistfully at her brilliantly flushed elder sister ever since the closing of the door.

"I did not," returned Josephine, with stout contradiction. "I told Miss Norman you had no room for her nephew, and you have n't, have you?"

"I thought I had."

"Then you have no proper spirit. Oh, girls, it was such fun," she went on, with blank disconsolateness; "it was when I was doing it, I mean. Miss Norman began on the very top round of the ladder, and I made her come down one step at a time, until at the bottom she pleaded with me meekly, and I condescendingly told her we would put down her name for the first vacancy."

"That must have been fun," exclaimed Vernon with relish.

"It was until I got here and that — man looked — into me! What sort of eyes are those, Helen? What do you mean by making such a friend as that, you unnatural sister?" Josephine seized the girl and gave her a little shake. Then she turned to Vernon. "Helen is his sort," she sighed; "Dr.

Latimer can spy about her soul with his blue lanterns all he likes, but you and I, Vernon,— the best thing we can do when he comes is to be as hypocritical as we may.”

The speaker passed an arm about her young sister, who responded to the unusual caress in pleased surprise. To be accepted as an equal with Josephine, even in sin, was an honor which caused her some elation.

CHAPTER VI.

A THEATRE PARTY.

TUESDAY evening of the following week had been set as the occasion of what Vernon termed a Dutch treat, she considering the title attractively appropriate inasmuch as Mr. Bruch had suggested the theatre party. Josephine had fallen in with the plan on condition that the expense be divided after the manner sometimes designated in Vernon's phraseology, so when the evening came it proved a treat indeed for the sisters to find themselves in the electric light of the theatre with their happy, attentive escort.

All four were enjoying the rare experience to the utmost, when in the midst of the second act of the play they were discovered by Olin Randolph, who had wandered into the theatre late and was now standing on the opposite side of the house. He first recognized Josephine with a sentiment of interest, then Bruch, who was seated between her and another girl, on whose other side a third young girl was sitting.

Olin examined them attentively. "The black-haired one, the brown-haired one, and the blonde with the turn-up nose who needs a controlling

hand," he reflected, and studied them for some time with a sort of critical curiosity. Once his Aunt Charlotte's aversions, now her despair, they looked so happy they could not fail to be attractive had they not possessed one claim to beauty.

As the curtain went down and Olin observed Bruch eagerly gazing through his spectacles from one to the other of his companions and chatting with a volubility apparently assisted by the curves and sweeps accomplished by the programme held in his hand, it occurred to Mr. Randolph that a foreigner should not be permitted to monopolize three domestic graces such as these. Moreover, by a happy accident, there was an empty seat beside the blonde, whose piquant nose deserved no such epithet as Miss Norman's.

Olin frowned a little as he took a last scrutiny of the trio to make certain that his undertaking would not be misplaced effort, and then, counting on Bruch's well-known good nature, strolled around the house to a spot where the restless spectacles could easily recognize him.

That occurred upon which he had counted. Mr. Bruch caught sight of him and bowed genially. Olin returned the bow with sufficient *empressement* to lead on the kind German, who was accustomed to his usual coldly polite manner. Bruch, seeing him alone and standing, recalled the fact of the empty seat beside Vernon, whose rather lonely estate he had been secretly and vaguely deploring, and motioned with his head to his pupil.

"It is my good friend Mr. Randolph," he explained to the girls, as Olin drew near in response to the gesture, yet slowly, as though he deprecated intruding upon Bruch's companions.

"Good-evening, Mr. Randolph," as the latter finally stood near. "I present you to the three Miss Ivisons. Mr. Randolph is one of my pupils," he added, addressing Josephine, who recognized at once the man she had met in her neighbor's hall, but showed no sign as she acknowledged his greeting.

"Is the play going well? I have but just come in and I have n't even a seat."

"There is one right there," responded the German, indicating the empty chair.

"Is it really vacant?"

"Certainly, no one claims it yet. It is for you, I am sure."

Thus encouraged, and sped with many genial nods from his teacher, Olin, after lingering for a few generalities, ascended the aisle and coming down through the next one took the seat beside Vernon, who was conscious that this was an added pleasure to the evening's festivities. This personable stranger enhanced the appearance of their party and she would not have to talk to him much, since the play would naturally absorb them all.

"I have heard of you often from Mr. Bruch," said the newcomer, as he received a direct inquiring glance from his neighbors' eyes, deciding mentally that their eyes were the strong point of the

three graces. "I believe you live out in the neighborhood of Kearsarge Avenue. I am very familiar with the locality."

"Are you? It is pleasant; is n't it?" responded Vernon, swelling within with a sudden consciousness of young ladyhood in her totally novel position, and feeling at Randolph's first word and glance a new sense of power and a triumphant conviction that she was now tasting the sweets of "society." "We live right across the street from the famous Miss Norman," she went on, and added, in a lower tone, "and the infamous Miss Norman, too."

Olin looked at her with an expression which caused her to smile mischievously. "That is only a little joke for my own private amusement," she explained. "You could n't understand it."

"Perhaps I might," drawled Olin, with a slight exaggeration of his usual manner of speech, "for Miss Norman is my aunt."

Vernon caught her breath in horror, and wished she had never entered society. She turned her scarlet face toward him.

"You will have to excuse me," she said, with blunt desperation, "for how could I know?"

Here the curtain went up on the third act, and she bestowed her attention rigidly upon the stage.

Mr. Randolph, being obliged to look past her to the actors, was enabled to amuse himself undetected by watching her instead, and elicited considerable entertainment from the signs of agitation in the

transparent young face until it occurred to him that it was a pity her pleasure should be clouded.

"You are thinking about me instead of the hero," he said at last, quite close to her ear.

Vernon had thought she was red before, but now her face flamed.

"It is n't fair," Randolph went on. "He is wounded and I am not."

"Are n't you, truly?" The girl looked around at him, incredulously and searchingly.

"Upon my honor."

Josephine turned her head and saw her sister's heightened color, and that she was talking with her companion. She gave an inquiring and displeased glance at Helen, who laid a gentle warning hand on Vernon's knee.

Nothing more was said until the curtain went down, and then Vernon turned to her neighbor with a smile and sigh which proved that of late her thoughts had been engrossed in the progress of the play.

She found him looking at her with a musing, critical expression which recalled to her her blunder.

"Is n't it interesting?" she said hurriedly.

"Yes, it is a good play," he replied absently. "I have been occupying myself, however, in putting two and two together."

"Has it taken you all this time?" asked Vernon, sufficiently embarrassed to take refuge in her native sauciness, despite a bringing-up which in-

culcated respect to her elders. "My sister has a school. Perhaps you might enter that."

"Oh, she won't take any of my family," responded Olin.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, and halted abruptly, for she suddenly comprehended.

"Yes," went on her companion. "I was wondering if it was because you had found my Aunt Charlotte — well, we will say not so famous as Aunt Agnes, that Miss Ivison the First refused to receive my cousin into Miss Ivison the Second's school, where, as I understand it, Dickie is especially desirous of playing games with Miss Ivison the Third."

"Well," said Vernon rather defiantly, "I don't see why the problem has anything to do with you."

"Ah, Miss Ivison, in real life one does n't flaunt all one's secret sorrows before a cold world. As a matter of fact, I have the right that suffering gives to inquire into this matter, for I am at present bearing upon my person two black and blue spots implanted during my cousin's transports on being informed that he was refused admittance to your paradise."

"Poor little Dickie," said Vernon, remembering the familiar, wistful face.

"Poor little Dickie! Well, I like that."

"If Helen knew it," said the girl, turning and speaking low and confidentially, "she would have him to-morrow."

"And Helen is?" — asked Randolph.

"Miss Ivison number two."

"Then let us tell her at once," and Olin leaned forward as though to put his suggestion into operation.

"No, no," said Vernon quickly, "you must n't. Josephine might not like it."

"And Josephine is?" —

The girl laughed. "My oldest sister; and let me advise you not to speak her name so distinctly."

"Thank you. I do not court annihilation, and I imagine from your tone" —

Vernon nodded significantly. "Your imagination is none too vivid."

"Well, about Dickie," said Mr. Randolph. "I should be pleased to hear that it would be safe for me to visit my aunts again."

"We will talk it over. It is a pity," added Vernon with much dignity, "that the innocent should suffer for the guilty."

"Thank you for your sympathy."

"I don't mean you at all. I mean Dickie."

"Oh, I am afraid the Ivison heart is a hard one."

"Mine is, I am glad to say," remarked Vernon, "but you ought to know Helen. You would n't wonder that I have to keep mine good and hard. There goes the curtain. Now, if this does n't come out right for that dear, deceived woman" —

"Why, you will be glad of your marble heart, of course. It is we ordinary mortals who will have to suffer."

After this it was rather hard for Vernon not to

be able to restrain a couple of large tears which would overflow at the climax of the last act, and it was small comfort to her that there was a general blowing of noses throughout the house, for instead of tears a smile was at the corners of her companion's lips when she stealthily turned her head. His eyes, however, were riveted on the stage. Perhaps he had not observed her.

Vernon wondered, after the play was over, whether he would insist upon helping Mr. Bruch to escort them home; but he did not. When, slowly moving, the party had reached the door, Randolph lifted his hat and thanked the German for the unexpected pleasure of his evening; then, with a good-night to the three girls, went his way.

"Has n't it been lovely!" exclaimed Vernon, as soon as they were at home again and alone.

Josephine looked thoughtful. "Do you know who that Mr. Randolph was, Vernon?" she asked.

"No. Is he anybody in particular?"

"I met him at Miss Norman's the other night, and Mr. Bruch tells me he is her nephew."

"Oh, yes, I found that out," replied Vernon, "after I had told him that his aunt was infamous."

"Vernon Ivison!" ejaculated Helen.

"Well," said the youngest, in an injured tone and with a frank gesture, "how was I to know he was anything to her?"

Helen regarded her reproachfully. "You could hardly have expected him to say 'Good-evening, Miss Ivison; I am Miss Norman's nephew,' when

he was first introduced, could you? I should think you were old enough to begin to learn some caution."

Vernon shrugged her shoulders. "Helen is sensitive on the subject of the Normans," she remarked.

"It is time one of us was, I think," retorted Helen with unusual spirit.

"Don't worry," put in Josephine, who was evidently following some train of thought of her own. "Girls, Miss Norman criticised us very plainly for living here by ourselves. I shall not forget that easily. I know our position; I feel it. It was stupidly cruel of her to suppose otherwise."

"Dear Jo," cried Helen, much troubled by the fire burning in the dark eyes, "why should you feel it more than we?"

"Because I am the oldest and have taken the responsibility of deciding upon our movements. This man Mr. Randolph has, I am sure, heard us discussed. When I called there the other evening he went into an adjoining room, I am confident of it, to gratify his curiosity by hearing me talk. To-night we have gone unchaperoned as we always are—must be if we take any outing at all—to the theatre with Mr. Bruch."

"For pity's sake, Josephine," put in Vernon, rather timidly, "you are n't going to say that was improper,—an elderly gentleman in spectacles like Mr. Bruch?"

"Mr. Bruch is a widower of about thirty-two,"

returned Josephine unmoved. "He is a young man. We went with him. There are many modifying circumstances in the case, but we went with him. Mr. Randolph came into the theatre and espied us. He turned those cold, curious eyes upon us and stared. I saw him. He said to himself: 'There are those three common girls my aunt talks about, and they're with Bruch. I wonder what they are like.' Then he observed the empty seat by Vernon, and knew the opportunity to find out had come.

"He strolled around the theatre and laid a trap for Mr. Bruch, who fell into it like the great, good-natured, unsuspecting child he is."

"Well, you are not an unsuspecting child," remarked Helen, as she paused.

"He then proceeded to examine our youngest at his leisure," pursued Josephine relentlessly.

"Yes," said Helen, "he got the kitten and she scratched him the first thing. Surely that ought to solace you a little, Josephine."

"If he had been such a plotter as you make out," added Vernon, "he would have come home with us."

"Oh! he did n't wish to trouble himself at all."

"Now Josephine," said Helen, "you know that is ungenerous."

"Well," admitted the eldest, "that was the one nice thing he did."

"Miss Norman did do us a real if temporary injury," said Helen seriously, "if her remarks wounded you, Jo, enough to make you cynical and

sensitive. You must n't let yourself sink into that, dear. We thought we were doing right when we came here, so we are innocent, and superior to unkind remarks in any case; but Dr. Latimer thinks we are doing right," she finished with triumphant emphasis.

"Does he?" asked Josephine eagerly and wistfully. "Has he said so?"

"Decidedly."

"Why, then," said Josephine thoughtfully, and with long pauses, "I can — bear it."

CHAPTER VII.

MR. BRUCH'S DINNER.

THE following evening Mr. Bruch had been invited to dine with the girls. Josephine and Helen combined their forces to cook the dinner, for as yet no servant had been added to the little domicile, and Vernon made the most of their slender resources to set an attractive table. Josephine praised her when she came in from the kitchen and sat down to cool her heated face and admire the effect of the festive board.

"Poor man, I know he will enjoy it so much," she said, in the sympathetic tone which she usually employed in speaking of the expected guest.

"I suppose he is learning American food by this time as he has learned the language," remarked Vernon. "Do you remember that evening when he tried so hard to tell us what queer dish he had had at the boarding-house? Don't you know he grew so excited and mixed in so many German words and we tried so hard to understand him? I remember we decided from his gestures and description that it must be some kind of floating island, and then it turned out to be biscuit!"

"Yes," laughed Josephine, "but we have one

thing to-night I am pretty sure he will like, and that is soup. I am sure we have taken pains enough with it, and I do trust we have put the right amount of salt 'between' it."

Mr. Bruch did like the soup. The girls were repaid by the entranced gaze he sent ceilingward when he had tasted the first spoonful. "It is a dream!" he declared with fervor. "And you did this?" he inquired, directing his spectacles at Vernon rapturously.

"No, no," she disclaimed, shaking her head.

"We all did it," said Josephine, "and we all claim the credit."

"We have soup some days at the pension" (Mr. Bruch gave the French word a purely American pronunciation, and was persuaded that in so doing he used the local designation for a boarding-house), "but it has no" — a disparaging gesture — "no little things between it, and, however, it is not bouillon. I am not realla satisfied with that house. I have a room now on the first floor and it is not a safe place. Burglars could enter with the greatest ease."

"You ought to have a pistol," suggested Josephine.

"A pistol is unsafe, too," responded the professor, when Josephine had easily overcome his scruples to taking a second plate of soup. "For myself, I have a hatchet and I put what they call the chain bolt on my door, which allows it to open a few inches."

"But what would you do with the hatchet," asked Vernon, "if you should hear burglars?"

The German looked up cheerfully. "I would pick at them through the door," he responded with much satisfaction, gesturing appropriately with his spoon.

The picture was too much for Vernon. She choked on the last drop of the soup which she had been politely husbanding in order that the professor's gastric region might become sufficiently warm.

"Vernon, we will let you be waitress for this course," said Helen, coming to the rescue. "Then I will clear the table next time. We will preserve an appearance of propriety by allowing Josephine to sit still throughout the dinner."

Mr. Bruch looked after the retreating tureen rather pensively. It had not been emptied. But his spirits rose when Vernon bore in the platter of roast beef.

"We are going to give you some real Yankee food for one vegetable," said Helen as a round baking-dish was set before her.

The professor regarded and recognized the steaming, appetizing, rich-brown contents.

"Oh, I know beans," he announced genially, and Vernon withdrew again hastily to the kitchen and did not at once return.

"Vernon, where is the gravy?" called Josephine warningly, when she considered that the youngest had giggled long enough, upon which,

after a slight delay, the girl reappeared, solemn and rosy, with the desired delicacy and again took her seat at the table.

While this satisfactory dinner was going forward, one was being partaken of across the street in quite a different spirit. As a rule Miss Norman was careful not to talk of depressing subjects at the end of her sister's long day; but such was her harassment to-night that she could not refrain. Olin was present, as his Aunt Agnes had requested him to come for the purpose of discussing some desired improvements in her beloved seaside cottage.

Dinner always had to be rather a late meal at the Normans', so Dickie was safely out of the way and his long-suffering aunt could recount her trials freely.

"I declare, it seems as though my whole life were reversed," she said mournfully, "since this disappointment has come to that child."

"Why don't you try reversing Dickie and applying your slipper?" suggested Olin.

"He is not to blame at all," answered Miss Norman. "How is the little fellow to forget when the plays and songs are in his eyes and ears every day? I am sure my heart aches for him, and I consider those young women very unkind and disobliging indeed." Miss Norman spoke with feeling, for only that very day the mother of two of Helen's pupils had been speaking to Miss Charlotte in praise of the gentle, skillful teacher who had

solved the problem of occupation for her lively children.

"It is a very strange condition of things, I think," remarked Agnes. "Why does n't Miss Ivison enlarge her borders?"

"I suppose she can't," answered her sister distantly.

Mr. Randolph smiled at his own thoughts. "I will tell you what you can do, Aunt Charlotte. Offer to make a business arrangement with the teacher by which Dickie shall be allowed to join in the outdoor festivities of the school."

Miss Norman looked up hopefully and seemed to gaze quite through her nephew.

"Why have n't I thought of that before?" she demanded.

Agnes took advantage of the reverie into which her sister fell to approach the subject near her heart.

"You see, Olin," she began in a low tone in order not to break the spell which had given her her opportunity, "there is not an eligible window in the Nautilus from which we can see the White Mountains. It is often too cool at sunset to be pleasant to sit on the piazza. I want to throw out a bay-window at the north of the parlor" —

"I believe I shall go over there this very evening," said Charlotte, coming back to her surroundings, and unconscious of interrupting.

"I would," replied Agnes, who desired nothing more ardently than to be left alone with her

nephew. "They cannot have much more than finished dinner, and you would be sure to catch them."

"Won't you come with me, Olin?" asked Miss Norman. "I don't like to go alone, and when Agnes does get an evening at home I can't bear to disturb it."

"Do you need any escort?" asked Agnes suggestively. "I wanted to talk to Olin about the cottage. I want to tell you my ideas," turning to Randolph, "and get you to send exact instructions to Saunders, so he can make the changes before we get there."

"Oh, it won't take us long, Agnes," observed Miss Norman. "I don't think it would be quite dignified for me to run across in the evening alone, as though I were on terms of intimacy with the Ivisons."

Mr. Randolph smiled again. He wondered what Miss Norman's sensations would be could she be informed of the epithet bestowed upon her by the young person in need of a controlling hand. He considered that it would be the part of wisdom to inform his aunt that her neighbors were not wholly strangers to him.

"I met those young ladies at the theatre the other evening."

"Did you, indeed? I wonder if one of the parents took them."

"He is a parent, yes. It was the German teacher, Mr. Bruch."

"H'm, yes," said Miss Norman abstractedly. It was quite characteristic that she had no criticism to offer or even to feel. She had no qualms on the subject of taking her nephew into the once-despised flat. She had become a creature of one idea, and the little child with the cropped yellow hair, asleep upstairs, represented it.

"Come on, Olin," she said when they had finished. "Let us get it over, so that you can return to Agnes."

"Yes," added the latter. "I think with Charlotte's mind at rest we can make more headway."

"Oh, it is all very well for you to use that tone Agnes; but you don't live with Dickie all day."

Miss Norman was soon bonneted and shawled, and the two set forth for that home where at last, all prejudice, obstacles, and pride forgot, Miss Charlotte was eager to set her foot.

They climbed the stairs, seeing their way by the gas lighted in the hall above, and a sound of laughing voices in the front room ceased suddenly as Olin knocked at the door.

The girls had taken their guest into the school-room, which now boasted a few of what Vernon called grown-up chairs, and the astonishment caused in the group by the apparition of Miss Norman and her nephew was for a second paralyzing. Fortunately for his hostess, Mr. Bruch's surprise was pleasurable. He grasped Randolph's hand with an exclamation warm enough to break the ice, and Helen recovered herself first and welcomed Miss Charlotte.

"You have met one of my sisters," she said, and Josephine colored violently, suddenly confronted with the memory of her prevarication. "This is my youngest sister," added Helen, and Miss Norman gazed with interest at Vernon, who certainly looked as though she needed controlling as she laid a reluctant hand in that which Miss Norman proffered.

"My nephew, ladies," said the latter, after she had scrutinized the face she had seen so often laughing over the romps in the yard. "Thank you," this to Helen, who gave her a chair after introducing Mr. Bruch. "I have called to interrupt you a moment. I was unsuccessful in my first attempt to make a business arrangement with you," here the speaker paused and took a deliberate survey of the number of little chairs. "I should think," she broke off suddenly, "that you had room to take more children here."

Poor Helen hesitated and turned red, and Josephine tardily repented having brought her to such embarrassing straits, until she happened to catch Olin's eye. Its expression restored her poise.

"I do hope to enlarge the school after a while," replied Helen at last, faintly.

"So do," said Miss Norman. "I should think you would do it at once."

Helen's meek eyes sought Josephine helplessly.

"When she does she will let you know, I am sure, Miss Norman," put in the latter sweetly.

Charlotte regarded her and then looked back at Helen.

"Meanwhile, Miss Ivison, I wish to ask you to permit Dickie to join in the children's plays, under a business arrangement."

Helen nodded. She would not even look at Josephine, for even if that authority demurred she determined at once to accede to this request.

Vernon had repeated a part of her conversation with Randolph at the theatre, and Josephine had no desire to interfere further. She turned determinedly from listening to the interview and accosted Olin, who was seated near her.

"You are studying with Mr. Bruch, he tells me," she remarked coldly, with an appearance of yielding to the necessity for conversation.

"Yes," replied the young man.

"You knew something of the language already," said Josephine, after waiting a moment, and then regretted having admitted that they had talked about him. Even in her busy and careful life she had had plenty of experience in admiring glances and deferential behavior from the other sex. The imperturbable manner and reflective gaze with which Randolph replied to her was novel; his lingering speech, exasperating.

"I picked up some German in school, of course, but when I went over there the year after I left college I found there was something left to desire in my command of the language. I stayed in Berlin several weeks and found it convenient to

simplify matters by flipping up every morning to see whether I should use *der*, *die*, or *das* all through the day. Are you studying?"

"Yes. We enjoy our lessons very much." Josephine smiled involuntarily at the remembrance of some speech of the earnest teacher. It was the first time the visitor had seen her smile, and a little light of gratification succeeded the critical scrutiny of his eyes.

"Mr. Bruch pours balm upon my wounded feelings at times," he returned, glancing at the German, who was conversing volubly with Vernon. "He asked me, the other evening, to translate 'They fell against the enemy.'"

Josephine's smile grew. "Did you tell him he ought to have said 'upon' instead of 'against'?"

"Not I. Why should I make him less entertaining?"

The girl shook her head disapprovingly. "I am hindered from correcting him by the dread of making him feel constrained in talking to us, for he has so little social life," she said; "but you could do it, and you ought to help him."

"Oh," thoughtfully, "from conscientious motives?"

"Why, certainly. I often think I am scarcely honest with him in keeping silence."

"Indeed? Your standard of honesty is high."

The look of amusement with which Olin said this lighted a fire of resentment in Josephine's breast which sent its flame into her cheeks.

"Your information on the subject was gained in the most honorable manner, I suppose," she said, looking straight into his eyes. "I am learning that you enjoy being entertained at any cost, Mr. Randolph."

"If you look at me in that way any longer, Miss Ivison, I shall call for help," returned the latter with unmoved calm.

"Are n't you even going to apologize?" asked Josephine, biting her lip.

He regarded her questioningly. "Do you know we are having a very odd first interview?" he returned mildly.

"The sort to make neither of us anxious for a second, I should think," returned the girl shortly.

"See my aunt," observed Olin. "Your sister has evidently treated her more kindly than you have me. She looks very happy."

"My sister always makes people happy," replied Josephine, looking over at Helen and wondering what sort of compact she had sealed.

"Then I will call on her next time," said Randolph.

His companion surveyed him with faint astonishment. "There is no question of your calling upon us at all. We do not receive visitors, — men, I mean."

Her companion appeared to be surprised. "And Mr. Bruch?"

"Is our teacher."

"And Dr. Latimer?"

"Oh, do you know Dr. Latimer?" Josephine really surprised her interlocutor this time with her entire change of tone and expression. She even leaned toward him a little in a manner which would have tempted him to claim intimacy with the doctor in any case.

"I can't remember a time when I have not known him," he answered. "He was a very dear friend of my father."

"I congratulate you."

"My father has been dead many years, and the doctor has been very kind to me."

"And so he has been to us, and so he is to everybody, I am sure," replied the girl earnestly. "He will be glad," looking across at her sister, "if Helen takes your little — the little Norman boy."

"Dickie's name is Starbird. Yes, we shall all be glad to find that you are not implacable."

"I!" exclaimed Josephine, with a dignified retreat into surprise.

"Why, certainly. Did n't you just say Miss Helen makes every one happy?"

"You are priding yourself unduly on your penetration, Mr. Randolph. Let me remind you that you know little of the subject you are talking about."

"Nevertheless, I suppose I may be permitted to hope meekly that joining in the games may be an entering wedge for Dickie. Let me assure you, Miss Ivison, that my Aunt Charlotte has expiated a long list of crimes in the last two weeks."

Josephine tried to look severe, but some embarrassing reflection was evidently troubling her.

"Does Dr. Latimer," she began, hesitatingly, "does Dr. Latimer know that you—that I—have you ever told"—

She looked inquiringly at Olin, who waited, apparently mystified.

"You know very well what I mean!" exclaimed the girl with glib annoyance.

Randolph looked at her and smiled provokingly. "No, I have never told him."

"Of course you would n't have thought it worth while," she remarked, with evident relief, "and besides," with rising resentment, "you would not wish to tell him what you had no right to know. It would be as hard for you as for me, every bit."

Miss Charlotte now rose, evidently overflowing with satisfaction. "I must take Mr. Randolph away," she said smilingly to Josephine, who also rose with alacrity. "My sister had an engagement with him this evening to talk over changes in our seashore house. Mr. Randolph is an architect, and she did n't like it at all to have me run off with him." She turned back to Helen; and Olin, rising, addressed Josephine, whose cold reception of Miss Norman's information had not escaped him.

"Dr. Latimer has a house near my aunt's on this island, where they go in summer," he said.

"Oh, has he?" returned the girl, interested at once. "Is it a pretty place?"

"Very," replied Randolph promptly. "I have some pictures of it, if you would like to see them. I've an excellent one of Dr. Latimer's house," he added, as she hesitated.

There was a general murmur of good-bys, in which Mr. Bruch also made his grateful farewell, and Josephine had not made any reply to Olin's suggestion when the girls found themselves alone.

"There!" exclaimed Vernon, staring at her sisters and striking a tragic attitude. "Did you ever know such luck? I wish Mr. Bruch had stayed in Prussia among his *gehabt haben gewesen seins*, and *never* come over here."

"What is the matter?" inquired Helen, astonished.

"Onions!" ejaculated Vernon with a dramatic gesture. "Here has our house been filled with the odor the whole afternoon just so there should be plenty of seasoning 'between' his old soup, and this evening of all evenings Mr. Randolph should come to call on us!"

"He did not come to call upon us," returned Josephine with a princess-like air.

"No, he came to bring auntie," smiled Helen.

"Never mind, he came," said Vernon sententially.

"He came, he saw," began Helen gayly. She was quite as relieved as Miss Norman by their interview.

"He smelled a German boarding-house," groaned Vernon.

"How can you be so childish as to care," asked Josephine superbly, "so long as Mr. Bruch was satisfied? It is a matter of the utmost indifference to us what Mr. Randolph thought of our surroundings."

"It may be to you, but it is n't to me," replied the youngest inconsolably. "Mr. Randolph is so elegant and distinguished. I think you need n't have kept him all to yourself if you did n't like him. I tried so hard to hear what you were saying, but I could n't get a word. Mr. Bruch always roars so."

"I should have been very glad to exchange with you," responded the eldest coldly.

"I do hope Mr. Randolph will never cover his mouth and teeth with a mustache," remarked Vernon reflectively. "A handsome man without a mustache looks as distinguished as a handsome girl without a bang."

"He will probably be very thankful to do so when he can," said Josephine with light disdain.

"The idea! He could now. Can't you tell that by looking at his upper lip? A man who can tell a lie but won't is superior to George Washington; and the man who can wear a mustache but won't has the same sort of superiority. See? Good-night. I'm going to bed to forget that we ever gave Mr. Bruch a dinner," and Vernon whirled out of the room.

Josephine regarded Helen with a whimsical smile. "I presume you have a new pupil, my dear."

"How could I?" asked Helen reproachfully. "Of course I could n't betray you by taking the Norman boy into the school right off."

"You are letting me down easy, as the boys say, that is a good little sister. But Dickie Norman's name is Richard Starbird, my love. Let us be correct now that we are going to be honest henceforth."

"Is it? So there were four sisters of them," said Helen meditatively.

"Yes, and one of the sisters must have married a very superior man, for he was a dear friend of Dr. Latimer's. I wonder," scornfully, "if any of the superior traits are going to develop in time in the son."

"Oh! are you talking about Mr. Randolph?"

"Yes, brown bird. Wake up."

"I can't," answered Helen yawning. "Dinner parties are 'tiring,' as Mr. Bruch would say, when one has to be cook and waitress and hostess, and we've all three been a third of each. Let's go to bed."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ISLAND PHOTOGRAPHS.

It was not long afterward that Dr. Latimer's housekeeper mounted the stairs to the flat, on neighborly kindness bent. Helen was busy in the school, and Vernon heard the step and came out to see who the newcomer might be.

"I was lighter once," announced Persis, breathing rather hard and looking up sharply to see if it was Helen's somewhat familiar face above her.

"The stairs are rather steep," said Vernon.

"I suppose you're one o' the sisters," went on Miss Applebee, as she gained the landing. "Dr. Latimer sent me over to see you. Be you the oldest?"

"No; I'm only Vernon," replied the girl. She guessed at once the caller's identity. "Come right in this way," opening the dining-room door. "My sister Helen is busy with her school, but if it is something important I can call her."

"No; you'll do just as well, I guess," said the visitor, looking about her as she seated herself. "Well, you've got it comfortable here," she added, looking at Vernon in a pleasant, motherly way that the girl liked. "I'm Persis Applebee," she went

on. "I do for Dr. Latimer, and he's been noticin' the last day or two that you was advertisin' for a girl. Have you got one yet?"

"No; it is very hard to get one," answered Vernon. "We can't pay much, you know."

"You had n't ought to in this little place," remarked Miss Applebee comfortingly.

"I thought I could do everything at first," said Vernon, "but I kept burning my fingers, and besides, Josephine — that's my oldest sister — said we should n't keep well if I cooked any longer, and so we advertised."

Persis, her hands folded under her shawl, regarded the serious face and shook with silent laughter.

"Poor little girl!" she remarked.

"And it is too much for Helen to have to do anything about it," went on Vernon. "She has just taken some more children into the school and it takes all her thought and strength, and I was feeling quite troubled about it this morning just before you came." Vernon looked hopefully into the visitor's pleasant, broad countenance, thinking it possible that help was coming from this quarter.

"I guess 't would n't be a very hard place for anybody," observed the other. "You don't have much comp'ny."

Vernon smiled. "No, indeed. We don't know anybody. We had our German teacher to dinner the other night, and I tell you we all had lots to do that day."

"You mean that Mr. Brook," said Persis. "Don't it beat all the way he talks?" and she laughed again in her silent fashion. "He was to lunch with the doctor the other day, and when some smelts was offered to him he says, says he: 'Don't these fish never grow any taller than this?' I thought I should ha' snickered right out."

Vernon laughed at Miss Applebee's effort to reproduce the German's precise and careful pronunciation.

"I've got somebody in my eye for you," pursued Persis. "There's a girl I know of that ain't over and above strong that I think would be glad of this place."

"We've had a number of applications," said Vernon, "but the girls all want more than we can pay."

"I'll send this one over to talk with you. I guess she'll come this evenin'."

"We're ever so much obliged to you," said Vernon, as the visitor stood up.

Persis eyed the fresh young face and grateful eyes approvingly. "The doctor's in the right on 't," she thought. "If they're all three like this, it's kind o' tough that there ain't any mother-bird in the nest."

"You know where the doctor lives, don't you?" she asked aloud.

"Helen does."

"Well, you just run around there any time if there's anythin' I can do for you. You say you don't know many."

"No, we don't know many and we don't know much," admitted Vernon frankly. "You and the doctor are very good to us."

Miss Applebee, usually antagonistic on principle to the many persons who made draughts upon her employer's time and thought, made an exception henceforth in favor of "the orphans," as she always termed the doctor's latest protégés.

She was as good as her word in regard to sending a girl to the flat, and this young woman, having been interviewed by Josephine, was promptly engaged and proved to be the right person in the right place. The exciting uncertainty which up to now had attended the anticipation of the daily meals was succeeded by a refreshing confidence. The income and outgo of the little *ménage* became better understood, and Vernon, after an evening of solemn conclave with her sisters, during which a large amount of figuring and estimating was accomplished, assumed the responsible position of housekeeper.

Mr. Bruch took much interest in these domestic arrangements, and feelingly gave Vernon to understand that the mental, moral, and physical welfare of persons depended largely upon the amount of good soup they imbibed.

Vernon gave him a stern glance in memory of her injuries. She had looked vainly in her walks abroad for one glimpse of that stalwart figure and impassive face whose elegance had been affronted under their roof.

"While I am housekeeper we shall not use any onions," she declared inflexibly.

"But, my dear young friend, you can use other things." Mr. Bruch was justly proud of his mastery of our "th," but was always obliged to hold his tongue in evidence between his teeth to accomplish the sound.

"But we can't have three courses every day," objected Vernon.

"At home with us," said Mr. Bruch solemnly, "we have pudding on holidays, otherwise not. Your pie is not good for you."

"That is what we will do, Vernon," put in Josephine, who was present. "That will be true economy. Soup and a second course, and dessert only on Sunday."

Vernon looked extreme disapproval. "Very well," she replied, turning away with an injured air. "I prophesy that you and Helen will be thankful enough to have me give you a little taffy every evening."

Josephine looked amused in spite of the fact that Vernon intended to be strictly literal; but even the cutting off of her favorite course at dinner could not depress the youngest entirely, in view of her important and congenial position. She liked her little account book and kept its columns with systematic neatness. She liked the daily planning necessary to give her family variety and still abide within the limits of the day's allowance. She liked the morning walk to market and her in-

terviews with the butcher and grocer, with whom she soon became a favorite customer, notwithstanding the small contributions she made to their fortunes.

With tactful frankness she threw herself upon the mercy of the marketman as follows:—

“I don’t know one thing about meat, and just as long as you will help me and tell me what the nice pieces are, I shall come to you and I won’t go to anybody else.”

“All right, mum,” responded the man, to whom this address was a novelty. Experience had rendered him pessimistic, however, and he added rather gruffly: “Everybody wants the best cuts, but ’t ain’t everybody’s willin’ to pay the best prices.”

“Oh, but I would rather have a little *little* piece of meat and have it nice; would n’t you?” responded Vernon; and the serious questioning in her violet eyes as she added the “would n’t you?” settled the matter for that butcher.

Sometimes when she had a large purchase of groceries to make, the young housekeeper went into the heart of the city to a mammoth establishment where prices were in inverse proportion to the scale on which business was done; and it was on one of these expeditions that she was at last rewarded for her scrutiny of crowds by a sight of the young man whose claim to interest lay principally in the fact that she feared he looked down upon her.

This being the case, as soon as she recognized him she made herself as tall as possible, endeavored to match his habitual indifference of expression with her own, and when they finally met threw a shade of surprise into the unsmiling bow with which she favored him.

Being secretly elated with her own performance, it was somewhat trying to be accosted languidly thus : —

“ Ah, good-morning. Why are n't you playing with Dickie ? ”

Vernon would have drawn herself up, but greater heights were impossible.

“ Because I sometimes have something more important to do,” she replied loftily.

“ Indeed ? Your manner points to matters of state.”

“ Well ! No matter of state could flourish without bread and butter, could it ? ”

“ You don't mean that you are marketing so far from home ? ”

“ Why not ? I go to different places.”

“ Are you the housekeeper ? ”

“ Yes.” Vernon swelled a little, then with sudden recollection added hurriedly. “ That is, I am now. I was n't when you were at our house.”

“ Ah ! Just promoted ? ”

“ Yes. I suppose you know my sister has taken Dickie altogether into the kindergarten,” said Vernon.

“ I do,” Mr Randolph sighed.

"So you can go to your aunt's again in safety," she added smiling.

"I'm not so sure about that, Miss Vernon. In this world if it is n't one thing it's another. Dickie has presented me with a bookmark!"

"Oh! one he worked himself in school."

"Ye-es. It is really a more serious visitation than the bruises, for they got well in time, and the a—bird on this bookmark does n't look as though anything could be done for him. It is—it is really harrowing."

"You ungrateful creature," said Vernon, her eyes twinkling. "The children are taught to make others happy, and you ought to take the will for the deed."

"Yes, of course, I understand; but if you would kindly mention to your sister that we are a small family, and that a very few bookmarks will fill us with all the joy we can sustain, I should esteem it a favor."

They could not well stand longer in the crowded walk.

Mr. Randolph lifted his hat and Vernon went on her way, smiling, and pleasurably impressed by his manner.

Although she had not thought it necessary to admit as much to Olin, she was hurrying now in order to finish her errands and be at home in time for the children's recess, for she retained her position as leader of their games, enjoying the romps as much as they did, and it follows that the little



ones loved her demonstratively. Dickie Starbird, who all his little life had been secluded from a contaminating world in such domains as his unfed imagination could construct from the materials in Miss Norman's front yard, now found activity, occupation, companionship, all that a healthy child desires, in the school, where he marched with strongest tread, sung with loudest voice, and used his eyes and fingers with the most concentrated energy of any of Helen's flock.

Miss Norman was delighted with his pleasure and his achievements, and often visited the kindergarten to watch his operations, blind to the other pupils in her fond admiration of the way Dickie's little awkward fingers, laboriously assisted by his tongue, wove or sewed under the teacher's superintendence.

These would have been dark and dreary days for Puggy but that he was allowed to career about with the children at recess, learning to run home when his playmates were called in, there to cry softly and reminiscently, and stare with his big pensive eyes, until Miss Norman declared that she was the most badgered woman in the world, and that it was her belief the very sticks and stones would be crying next to be allowed to go to Miss Helen's kindergarten !

She told Agnes all about it, — of Dickie's contentment and Puggy's intelligence, and Agnes listened as she always did listen through nine months of the year, with the preoccupied air which her

sister had accepted as one of the inevitable crosses of her life.

There was more comfort after all in talking to Dr. Latimer. He gave Miss Norman his whole attention when she confided in him, and nodded with satisfaction at her accounts.

"All this must make you feel very kindly toward Miss Helen," he remarked once at the close of Miss Norman's eulogy of Dickie's accomplishments.

"She has certainly not mistaken her vocation," replied Miss Charlotte, but she evidently did not wish to talk about Helen. The girl was a useful instrument, but the interesting facts regarded Dickie's actions solely.

Dr. Latimer was disappointed. It seemed so natural to him that Miss Norman, having a rather unusual amount of leisure, should take a strong neighborly and womanly interest in those three girls who, for all their independence, had been so grateful for his housekeeper's assistance. What made her conservatism the more surprising was the fact that in the past he had not found her a self-centred woman. He had known many instances of her helpfulness to outsiders. He could only believe that her prejudices were so strong that in this case she relaxed them only far enough to indulge her little nephew's imperious will.

"I suppose Dickie is fond of his teachers?" he asked.

"He likes them very much, I think," responded

Miss Charlotte, "and I must show you a mat he has just made. He was so proud of it, dear little fellow."

From Miss Norman's Dr. Latimer went to the Ivisons'. He usually did hear something at the former place which made him feel that he must look at the girls and see if they were all right.

He found them clustered around their dining-room lamp, as was usual in the evening.

Helen, who claimed the doctor as belonging rather to her than to her sisters, heard his step and flew to admit him.

He looked from one to the other with kindly scrutiny and saw that Josephine was pale.

"I'm glad it is nearing the end of the working season for you," he said, as he took her offered hand.

"Do I show that the day has been perverse?" she asked.

"Yes. How is the housekeeper?"

"I have n't disgraced myself yet," replied the youngest. "I have n't lost any money or bought anything that was very bad, have I, girls?"

"No, indeed," answered Helen. "You can imagine how busy Vernon is, Dr. Latimer. She goes in the morning to call for two children who are too small to come otherwise, and takes them home again when school is over, keeps house for us, and helps me all day!"

"No drones in this hive," remarked the visitor. "I hear Dickie Starbird is a very happy and promising pupil."

"He is a dear, earnest little boy," replied Helen.

"His aunt is very much pleased," remarked the doctor tentatively.

"She seems to be," answered the teacher, and said no more. It occurred to Dr. Latimer that Miss Norman's lack of cordiality was returned.

"Has either of you met Miss Agnes Norman?" he asked, looking at Josephine.

"No, I have never seen her. We heard about her, though, before we had been in Boston a week, and are looking forward to summer, when with the windows open we hope to get a great deal of her music under the rose."

"They go away in summer," answered the doctor, "and in any case Miss Norman rarely touches the home piano. She is to give a recital on Friday evening. Would you all like to go?"

The girls assented promptly.

"I should like to have you hear her. She is an excellent artist, and this is to be her last recital for the season. I will come for you on Friday evening."

"Oh, shall you go with us?" asked Josephine, so pleased and surprised that the ejaculation was involuntary.

"Certainly." Dr. Latimer smiled into the eager face, somewhat surprised himself. "I always go to hear Miss Norman play."

"She teaches, does n't she?" asked Helen.

"Yes, a few determined pupils, who submit to

be taught or dropped as her concert engagements decree; but she plays nowhere to more whole-hearted enthusiasm than in her own city. Her success is a notable exception to the saying about a prophet."

Here came a knock at the door, and Vernon answered it. To her own surprise and that of all present it was Olin Randolph whom she ushered into the small room. He felt a little disconcerted to perceive Dr. Latimer, and the latter was no better pleased to recognize the guest. The newcomer, however, evinced no discomposure.

"Is there room for one more?" he asked, looking at Josephine, who had risen at his entrance.

"Good-evening, Mr. Randolph," she said, with formality. "I believe you know Dr. Latimer. Won't you take a chair?"

Vernon laughed irrepressibly. "That is all very well to say when there isn't any chair," she remarked. "Wait one moment, Mr. Randolph."

"Here, let me get it," said the latter, hastening after her into the dim shade of the schoolroom.

Those in the dining-room could hear Vernon giggling as the caller seized the first chair that came to hand.

"That is Dickie's. No, no, that one won't do either. Here is Helen's. She will let you take it."

"I feel like Golden Hair trying the chairs in the fairy story," drawled Mr. Randolph, reappearing with his prize.

"Thank you. Do we look like the Three Bears?" asked Helen.

"Just as much as he does like Golden Hair," suggested Vernon, as they seated themselves.

"Does the analogy continue?" asked Dr. Latimer. "Have you run away from home, Olin?"

"No, doctor," replied the young man coolly. "You can't run away from what you don't possess, you know. I thought I would drop in, Miss Iverson," hardly addressing Josephine, who looked the reverse of gracious, "to show you those pictures of the island which you said you would like to see." He produced a paper package and proceeded to untie it. Josephine, finding it impossible to declare, as she longed to do, that she had said nothing of the sort, looked on helplessly.

"We fell to talking about the island the other evening, doctor, and I thought the young ladies would get a better idea of it from pictures than from my descriptions."

"It was an odd subject of conversation for you to choose, was n't it?" asked Dr. Latimer with a slight smile.

"I don't really know how we happened to hit upon it," returned Olin, lifting his fine head; "do you, Miss Iverson?"

Josephine murmured dissent and yearned to add that she had entirely forgotten that they ever did speak of it, but Dr. Latimer's presence restrained her from delivering any such snub. Miss Norman's persistently formal attitude toward the little household had not inclined Josephine to welcome that lady's nephew.

"What island is it?" inquired Vernon.

"The one where Dr. Latimer and my aunts have their summer homes;" and as the youngest showed most interest in his pictures Mr. Randolph offered the first to her. "Here," he added, addressing Josephine, and passing her a second photograph, that of a row of cottages, "here is our settlement. Dr. Latimer will show you which is his house—the Sea Shell."

Josephine looked with her first gleam of interest at the picture, and leaned toward the doctor, who put his finger on one of the plain little buildings which with its sister cottages seemed set upon a bare bluff above a quiet bay.

Vernon regarded the picture she held of a rock-strewn, sparsely wooded field doubtfully. "Is it a pretty place?" she asked.

"Why, it is a beautiful place," returned Olin, who began to find himself in a trying situation. It was hard that he should be forced to manufacture interest which he was known by the exasperatingly mute doctor not to feel; hard, indeed, that he of all people should be driven into booming the island. No wonder Dr. Latimer's face expressed amusement as he quietly regarded the picture in Josephine's hand. Yet how, if these photographs were not of an interesting locality, was Mr. Randolph to account for his existence in Miss Ivison's sitting-room at the present moment? He would have managed very well, he thought, but for the doctor's inopportune visit. As it was he

had no choice but to put a bold face upon the situation.

"See what you think of this," he added, handing Vernon another photograph. "It is the one of the wood road, doctor," he added airily.

Dr. Latimer merely bowed pleasantly.

"Why in the name of all that's friendly can't he enthuse a little?" thought Olin hotly. "Yes," he added, in reply to Vernon's pleased comment, "it is a very pretty place, — one of the most attractive on the island, to my mind."

"Then this is pretty, Miss Helen; the Willows, you know, doctor," suggestively.

Dr. Latimer nodded again.

"Confound him!" was Mr. Randolph's unspoken ejaculation. "Yes, Miss Helen, a lovely place; that coast, you know, although usually considered rather forbidding and rugged, abounds in little coves and bays and inlets, and the shore is often wooded." "Oh," groaned Randolph, in a mental aside, "I'm going on precisely like a page out of a geography. Why *won't* the doctor say something?"

He scattered the photographs upon the table, and even Josephine concluded from the unprecedented energy and glibness expended by the visitor upon his subject that he must be tenderly attached to this apparently unpromising bit of country, and liked him the better for his enthusiasm.

The sere-looking fields, and blank, unrippled water of the pale photographs gave so little excuse for admiration that she ran them over in the des-

perate hope now of finding something pleasant to say.

The doctor's honest, quiet voice broke an awkward pause.

"One cares very much for these pictures after he has visited the island," he said, "but words paint it for strangers more satisfactorily than the camera, I think."

"Well, that is just what we have been waiting for, doctor," replied Olin, falling back into his old manner. "I know of no one who can do the subject greater justice than yourself."

Dr. Latimer looked thoughtful. The "Divinity that shapes our ends" was a very real and near friend to him. An idea suddenly occurred to him while Josephine's pale face bent over the pictures. He wondered if Olin had brought them here that a purpose might be carried out far removed from the young man's personal schemes. The doctor stored the idea in his memory for future consideration.

"It is a subject that cannot be done justice to without more time than I have now at my disposal," he responded.

Yet although this implied an intention of taking his departure soon, the doctor lingered; not speaking often, and when he did, with the radiant serenity which was his most obvious characteristic; yet he waited, and at last Olin was convinced that the delay was on his account. As soon as the young man understood this he gave up the project he

had formed of outstaying his friend, and folded up the photographs.

"We are very much obliged to you, Mr. Randolph," said Helen gently.

"Indeed we are," added Vernon, who determined that everything short of asking him to come again she would do, look, and say in the way of encouragement. She thought it a shame that Josephine was not more cordial, and yet the eldest was sufficiently gracious in her manner of parting with the young man.

Both visitors finally found themselves in the street, and Olin waited in silence for his friend to speak as they took their way toward the horse-car.

"Did your aunt know you called on the Ivisons to-night, Olin?"

"What should make you ask that?"

"Because I saw you had Miss Charlotte's set of photographs, and I wondered if you told her what you were going to do with them."

"Well, I know of old that you don't ask idle questions, doctor. No, I did not tell her where I was going. I rarely tell her my movements."

"But in this case was your reason for silence not the fact that you knew she would disapprove your intention?"

Randolph gave a short laugh. "It would n't do the smallest good to deny it, doctor, to such a clairvoyant as yourself."

"If I am clairvoyant now it is because I feel a care of those three young girls. Suppose sisters

of your own to be living so unconventionally as they are. Should you not be grateful if young men like yourself would keep away from them?"

"I had n't thought about it," answered Randolph shortly.

"If you do think about it you will probably feel as I do, for I know you pretty well and believe selfishness is not your only mainspring of action. I hoped your aunts would take these girls up; then your intercourse with them would have been natural and agreeable; but you have heard Miss Charlotte's criticisms and know how women will be likely to regard those girls if they receive young men in their present situation."

"You need not continue, Dr. Latimer," said the other coldly. "Visiting the Misses Ivison is a matter of more indifference to me than you seem to imagine."

"Thank you for the assurance," replied the older man kindly. "Good-night, Olin," and the doctor boarded a car.

Randolph was obliged to wait a minute for one coming from the opposite direction. The package in his hand added its associations to his annoyance.

As he recalled the effusive commendation into which he had been betrayed on the subject of the despised island, he was obliged to admit that Dr. Latimer had let him off easily.

Nettled though he felt, he could not forbear a smile at the absurdity of his own situation as he stepped aboard his car.

CHAPTER IX.

AGNES NORMAN'S RECITAL.

FRIDAY dawned with a lowering sky, and by the time Josephine returned from her work her umbrella was in requisition.

"It is really raining; is n't it?" said Helen, as her sister came in. "I was hoping it would only threaten until the concert was over. You are tired, Josephine."

"No more than you are," replied the other cheerfully, taking off her jacket, "and now we both have until Monday morning to rest in, — and the concert!"

Helen looked at her sister curiously. The latter's look of anticipation was radiant.

"Then you don't mind going out again in the rain?"

"No, indeed; of course I would rather have had it pleasant, because I wish we might look our very best."

"Oh, you have come, Josephine," said Vernon dolefully, as she entered the room. "I wanted to wear my big hat with the ostrich tips, but Helen says they will all straighten out."

"Never mind," replied Josephine, drawing a

chair up before the little open fire in the school-room, where they were. "I can curl them again to-morrow, and your turban is n't nearly so becoming. Wear your best hat, by all means."

"Do you think it is going to be such a fashionable audience?" asked Helen, whose thriftiness was offended by this plan.

"I don't know anything about it," replied Josephine gayly. "I only know we are going with Dr. Latimer, and we must be a credit to him if it takes the whole of our next month's salaries to repair damages."

"Just supposing it was Mr. Randolph," said Vernon slowly, with meditative relish.

"We should n't be going if it were Mr. Randolph who had invited us," remarked the oldest quickly and in a changed voice.

"Well, I'd like to know why not?" inquired Vernon with injured dignity. "I would n't ask anything better than to enter a concert-room with him and have people see how attentive he was to me."

"After the things he has heard his aunt say about us?" asked Josephine severely. "I am ashamed of you."

Vernon blushed red, and rising left the room.

"You make a mistake, Josephine," said Helen seriously, "to keep those wounds to our pride before Vernon. I don't forgive myself for telling her, in the first place, what Miss Norman said. It is a cruel wrong to her to let such thoughts come

to her mind. She is a wonderfully innocent, child-like girl for her age, and if she says such things as she did a minute ago about Mr. Randolph it is only what most girls would think instead of saying."

"But the awful idea of her becoming sentimental about that man, of all men!"

"Her speaking out is a sure sign that she is not becoming so. But if you snub her and she loses the safety-valve of expressing those little fancies that every girl has, she will be very likely to become sentimental."

"We never had any sentimental fancies," objected Josephine.

"Yes, indeed, I did," answered Helen earnestly. "I used to be very much smitten with that boy in our room at school in Philadelphia, — what was his name, now, — that boy who always wore a white silk tie, don't you remember?"

Josephine laughed. "I don't know how I should remember, if you don't."

"Well, I was, anyway. I sent him a valentine once, and then suffered agonies for fear he should find it out. And we must n't be hard on Vernon; she is our baby and she is a dear girl."

"Yes, if she would only stay a baby until you were married, Helen, and could place her rightly in the world. She is provokingly pretty."

"She is," admitted Helen, gazing at the fire, her brow puckered in tribulation of spirit. "It is a worse kind than yours. You frighten people,

but Vernon invites them,— poor innocent little thing.”

“ Yet you won’t let me be a dragon,” said Josephine, slipping an arm around Helen’s waist.

“ You can learn to be a wise one, dear.”

“ I think our position is hard.” Josephine sighed wearily. “ Did n’t you see that Dr. Latimer did n’t like it the other evening because Mr. Randolph came in in that familiar way ? ”

“ No, I did n’t notice anything.”

“ Well, I did. Yet it was n’t our fault, and I — I want to be taken care of, Helen.”

The latter took the speaker’s proud head upon her breast and held her close in her slender arms.

“ That is why I look forward so much to to-night.” Josephine’s dreamy eyes looked into the fire as she talked. “ For a little while we shall be so beautifully taken care of, so beautifully respectable. It will be so different from going with Mr. Bruch.”

“ Mr. Bruch is just as respectable, — yes, and just as much of a gentleman as Dr. Latimer,” declared Helen with spirit.

Her sister smiled. “ Yes, but Boston people don’t know that, and everybody who is anybody knows Dr. Latimer. Besides, Mr. Bruch is too young. Dr. Latimer’s gray hair will be as much to us to-night as his social standing.”

“ Josephine, Josephine,” said Helen, patting the silky, dark head, “ you are worse than proud, you are vain. Vernon’s little castle in the air was born

of the fact that Mr. Randolph has a fine presence, and I don't see that you are much her superior."

"Which reminds me," replied the eldest, sitting up and sighing again, "that I must go and make my peace with the baby."

On that same rainy afternoon Miss Norman had been much astonished to receive a visit from her oldest nephew. She saw him come in the gate and flew to open the door, anxiety expressed in every lineament of her questioning face.

"What is the matter, Olin? Is your Aunt Agnes ill?"

"No," replied the visitor, surprised by this reception. "What is the excitement, Aunt Charlotte?"

"There is n't any that I know of if Agnes is all right, but I have been looking for her this long time. She ought to have been home long ago resting for this evening, and it worries me to have her stay at her room so late."

"I fancy Aunt Agnes knows her own business," replied Olin calmly, walking into the parlor.

"Oh, well, you don't know how tired she is always at this season. She ought n't to go to her room at all when she is going to play, for she sees this person and that, and is in more or less excitement all the time. I hope you're not ill yourself, dear," added Miss Norman with fresh anxiety.

"No, thank you. I just came out to see you on the spur of the moment. I had a bright thought

and concluded to strike while the iron was hot. It occurred to me you might like to pay some attention to Dickie's teacher; so I brought out some tickets for to-night."

Olin slipped his hand into an inside pocket and produced an envelope. Miss Norman looked surprised.

"What put that into your head, pray?" she asked, more astonished than she wished to express. This unheard-of energy on the part of her nephew amazed her.

Olin gave one of his slight, lazy smiles. "You must admit, my dear aunt, that for the last few weeks you have not allowed me to forget the Misses Ivison. Naturally, I supposed you would enjoy giving them a pleasure, had this easy means occurred to you."

"I do not imagine they are at all cultivated in music," objected Miss Norman.

"Still they would like the attention," replied her nephew.

"You and I were going to sit together."

"So we are still. I simply took five seats instead of two."

"You want me to invite all three of them?" Miss Norman's reluctant manner became aggrieved.

"I want you?" repeated Olin slowly, with a masterly commingling in his manner of dignity and delicate reproach. "I supposed I was giving you an opportunity."

He looked at his aunt with a cold surprise that she dreaded.

"I would so much rather go alone with you," she pleaded. He put the envelope back in his pocket. "But as you say, Olin," she hastened on conciliatorily, "it would be a great opportunity for them, and it was certainly very kind in you to think of it and go so much out of your way."

Her nephew again drew forth the tickets. "Then I will leave four with you," he said. "I shall be very busy this afternoon, and can't possibly come out again to-night before the performance. The best I shall be able to do will be to meet you at the hall. You had better go across the way at once and give your invitation. Too bad the weather is so unpleasant," and the young man took his departure without hearing another word from his aunt's lips.

Miss Norman stood in the middle of the room and regarded the unwelcome tickets she held. What an extraordinary proceeding this was on Olin's part! Miss Charlotte could not comprehend it; and, now the young man's compelling influence was removed, she liked her task less than ever. The home of her three neighbors was glorified in the morning by the fact that within it Dickie spent several happy and improving hours, but during the latter part of the day it was as obnoxious as it had ever been.

Miss Norman's thin nostrils dilated. She must go upstairs now and don her waterproof and rub-

bers and bonnet, take her umbrella and go across the street to invite three uninteresting individuals, who would perhaps disgrace her by an unrefined style of dressing, to accompany her and spoil for her the last concert given this season by her precious Agnes.

It was a bitter pill to swallow. For an instant Miss Norman entertained the project of putting off her request until so near the hour for departure that it would be unlikely that the girls could get ready; but her own rectitude would have been sufficient to withstand this temptation, even had she not had forebodings of Randolph's inquiries. That awe of a masterful man-relative entertained by most single women — and married ones, too, for that matter — was strong upon Miss Charlotte where her tall, critical nephew was concerned, and the recollection of a certain expression in his hazel eyes, cold as steel, made her suddenly start for the staircase.

She determined to stand well with Olin at whatever cost, and rather hoped that the girls would show themselves underbred either in costume or manners, thereby shocking that fastidious young man into minding his own business henceforward.

Josephine had but just soothed Vernon's wounded sensibilities and returned to the empty schoolroom, when the astonishing apparition of her opposite neighbor came up out of the rain.

"Why, Miss Norman!" she exclaimed, "let me take your umbrella;" for Charlotte was looking

around in high-nosed discomfort, evidently at a loss where to place the dripping silk. As though with malice aforethought, the clouds had opened and the rain descended in a sudden flood a moment before, just as she started to cross the street.

"The storm is becoming quite fierce," she declared with evident annoyance. "Thank you, Miss Ivison, it will hardly be worth while for me to sit down. I merely called to ask you and your sisters to go with me to a concert to-night."

Miss Norman's manner was far from ingratiating, but Josephine was too generous-hearted to be hypercritical of her tone. The fact that Miss Charlotte had herself come out in all this rain to invite them touched the sensitive girl with gratitude. She was eager to stand on friendly terms with a woman of Miss Norman's age, and gladly welcomed this sign that her neighbor had thought better of her first impressions and was willing to open social relations with them, aside from business.

She took a step nearer. "I thank you so much, Miss Norman," she said warmly, "and so will my sisters; but I am sorry it happens that we have engaged to" —

Josephine was about to add that they were going to the recital with Dr. Latimer, but Miss Charlotte did not give her time.

"Oh, if you are engaged, of course that is all right," she interrupted, making the fact of its entire satisfactoriness additionally patent by her

altered tone and the little laugh of evident relief with which she accompanied her words.

Josephine, conscious of a shock of surprise, knew not whether to be amused or vexed, but was not obliged to speak, for her visitor talked on.

"I will hurry right home, I think, as my garments are so wet and uncomfortable. Moreover, I have yet to oversee Dickie's violin practice this afternoon. We allowed him to begin when scarcely more than a baby, because he evinced such decided taste. Good-afternoon, Miss Ivison. Thank you," receiving her silently offered umbrella, "the rain seems to have lessened a little now. A — remember me to Miss Helen. *Good-afternoon.*"

"Who was that?" asked Helen, coming in just as the door closed.

"Miss Norman," replied Josephine, regarding her sister with a peculiar expression.

"What did she want?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Josephine, laughing at last at the recollection of the short scene. "What she said was that she came to ask us to go to the concert with her, but she was the most delighted woman you ever saw when I told her we could n't."

"What is Jo laughing at?" asked Vernon, appearing at the door, full of curiosity.

"Why, Miss Norman has been here to ask us to go to the recital with her," explained Helen, "and Josephine thinks she did n't really wish us to accept."

"I am sure of it, my dear. She left her regards for you as a reward of merit. One might as well laugh as cry, but the question is, What does she mean by it? What could her motive have been?"

"I saw Mr. Randolph go in there about half an hour ago," remarked Vernon. "Perhaps he brought her tickets."

Josephine stopped laughing, and gazed at the youngest with a look that penetrated beyond her.

"That is it, of course," she exclaimed at length. "Mr. Randolph put her up to it, and perhaps insisted upon her inviting us. Why in the world can't that man let us alone?"

Josephine looked so displeased that Helen hastened, as was her wont, to pour on oil.

"I am sure we might as well laugh as cry about *that*," she said. "I find it quite entertaining that such a swell as Mr. Randolph finds time to take thought for us. In fact, I think on this occasion he did something very kind, provided your guess is right."

"So do I," hazarded Vernon, not quite sure but that the eldest would be heated to the danger-point by this opposition.

"I call him an impertinent person," declared Josephine.

"Then you are ungenerous," said Helen. "Anybody could see that if he suggested his aunt's inviting us he meant well."

"People that mean well are always doing clumsy things," returned Josephine. "How glad I am

we were really engaged and could refuse," and her face lighted again as she thought of the evening.

It was about an hour afterward, and nearly time to sit down to dinner, when a boy clattered up the stairs and left a large, white box at the girls' door.

Upon examination it was found to contain roses, fresh, crisp, and sweet, and many and eager were the exclamations of joy that greeted it. Close search failed to reveal a card.

"Dr. Latimer would know that his name would be superfluous," said Josephine, lifting an American Beauty close to her face where it irradiated her fine pallor. Her dark eyes grew soft and velvety.

"Now girls, you see he expects us to appear as well as we can. We must do our best. Never mind the rain."

Helen sighed gently, but meekly put on her best gray gown, and as she pinned on her heavy roses hoped for the best, although the rain could be heard pitilessly beating on the flat roof over her head.

"We must n't keep him waiting," said Josephine energetically. "Here, Vernon; let me look at you."

The young girl, in a dress of golden-brown, somewhat darker than her hair, and a hat of brown felt, whose tawny feathers were the pride of her heart, stood before her sister with a face as fresh as the flowers on her bosom.

"What a pretty thing you are!" thought the

eldest, but she said nothing as she gazed non-committally.

"Those feathers will never be good for anything again," observed Helen in a last faint protest.

"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber," remarked Josephine. "I suppose I'm all right," she added, with a final turn toward the glass. She was arrayed in black, which was her habit. "In the first place, I am old," she was wont to say, "and in the second place, I have to be outdoors too much to have anything but a black street dress."

However, she had the natural style which is grace and tastefulness combined, and her clothes, no matter how plain, suited her.

"You always look the best," replied Vernon frankly, "and I do wish you could always have a lot of red roses to wear, Jo. When Dr. Latimer comes he will say to himself: 'The Empress Josephine!' See if he does n't."

"It will be a little difficult to see what he is thinking," laughed the eldest; "but I hope he will like us."

Dr. Latimer did like them when, a few minutes later, he stood in the schoolroom regarding his charges. Privately he was astonished to see the lavish and expensive flowers with which the girls were decked, and which would certainly not have appeared in such proud evidence on one bosom had Josephine suspected that this was his first knowledge of them.

"We're all ready," cried Vernon, at sight of him, standing tall and stately under the light from the little chandelier which fell on his silvery waves of thick hair and the snowy silk that was folded across his chest beneath his overcoat.

"A great virtue," he responded smiling.

"He always smiles more at Vernon than at us," thought Josephine. "I fancy he likes kittens better than empresses, but it is too late for me to be a kitten now."

Vernon looked at her proudly as she came to greet him.

"We have been hoping this rain would stop," said Helen, "but I hear it pattering away fast as ever."

"Yes," replied the doctor. "I think you will not get wet, though. I have a carriage, and with my umbrella we shall manage very well."

The relief that this announcement carried to Helen's heart! She had been picturing their group huddled together at a street-corner waiting for a horse-car that would n't come, while the rain trickled in rills down their umbrellas and the dampness performed its deadly work on their finery.

Now Helen told herself she had been worse than foolish. It was impossible to conceive that Dr. Latimer should lead any one into circumstances of discomfort and misfortune, even in trivial matters.

As for Josephine and Vernon, they could not be happier, so one by one the three were piloted

across the wet sidewalk and seated on the comfortable cushions of the carriage; the doctor took his place beside Vernon and the door was closed. Josephine noticed that the coachman did not perform this operation with the usual slam, and it seemed after all quite natural that Dr. Latimer's carriage-door should not make any unnecessary noise.

They sped along smoothly and swiftly to their destination, and Josephine was too deeply content to speak.

Olin Randolph was awaiting his aunt's coming at the entrance of the concert hall with a sentiment of interest, which, although he was a sufficiently dutiful nephew, had not always been so keen under similar circumstances.

At last she entered the lobby, and although she looked unusually well, Olin's brow contracted at sight of her.

"Ah, there you are," she exclaimed as he came forward. "I drove in with Agnes, and, I hope you have n't been waiting long."

"No; but where are the young ladies?"

"Who?" Miss Norman looked blank for an instant. "Oh, you mean the Misses Ivison. Yes, I went over there as soon as you were gone, and became drenched, too." Miss Charlotte's gold eye-glasses returned her nephew's displeased gaze with the boldness of conscious integrity. "I saw the eldest and gave my invitation, but she said they were engaged for this evening."

"Indeed! Was it an excuse, do you think?"

"Not at all." Miss Norman shook her head emphatically. "She seemed sincerely sorry to refuse."

"Ah, did she?" brightening.

"Why, of course." Miss Charlotte was scandalized at the implication that her attention could be slighted. "It was so kind of you, dear," she went on, "to send us these beautiful roses." She touched one of the blushing blossoms she was wearing. "Dr. Latimer always sends Agnes flowers when she is going to play, but she was so pleased with your attention that she is going to carry both to-night."

"I am glad you like them," answered Olin shortly. "Shall we go in?"

Not Miss Ivison herself was more content than Miss Norman as she took her seat beside her adored nephew, enjoying having him all to herself the more after the averted danger of sharing him with three others.

She looked around the house with complacent satisfaction. "There is going to be a crowd, Olin," she declared.

He said something in reply, which his aunt lost, for her attention was suddenly attracted by four persons who were passing along a neighboring aisle.

"What? It can't be! It is! Olin Randolph, Dr. Latimer has brought those girls to the concert!"

There was no lack of interest in Mr. Randolph's countenance now. Eagerly following Miss Norman's glance, he saw the group just as they were filing into their seats.

"Well, that beats everything yet!" ejaculated Miss Charlotte.

"It does,—that is a fact," admitted her nephew. "No other party in the house can compare with them."

"Nonsense. I don't mean that. What will people think?"

"They may think Dr. Latimer has adopted three daughters. I should think he would be tempted to."

"Do you suppose he sent them those flowers?" pursued Miss Norman. "They're as handsome as mine."

Her nephew had good reason to suppose Dr. Latimer innocent of the attention, so did not hazard a remark.

"I do not believe he did; and if those foolish, extravagant girls bought them they have done something in quite as bad taste as I expected."

"By all means believe them guilty until they are proved innocent," remarked Olin dryly. "I wonder you send your hopeful among such demoralizing influences."

"There is no occasion for you to be severe, Olin. I simply mean that one mustn't expect old heads on young shoulders, and that it stands to reason girls with no one to guide them will do foolish

things. Well, I never knew Dr. Latimer to evince his philanthropy in that manner before."

Meanwhile the objects of Miss Charlotte's curious gaze had discovered her, and bows were exchanged.

Josephine's quick eyes observed the three significant vacant chairs beside Miss Norman, also her decoration of flowers; noting that her roses were the twins of their own.

She called Helen's attention to the fact, and the sisters exchanged a startled glance.

"How silly," said Helen in a hasty undertone. "As if two people might not have selected the same flower."

"I don't believe it," replied Josephine, as low but warmly. "Dr. Latimer would never have chosen these great staring things anyway." Her hand rose quickly to her breast.

"Josephine Ivison, stop!" Helen, like all gentle people, was usually heeded on the few occasions when she became imperious. "Mr. Randolph is looking directly at us. How can you think of doing such a childish thing!"

"Why did n't we realize immediately that it was he?" asked the other; but her hand fell. "I said something feeble to Dr. Latimer about the beauty of our roses, instead of thanking him outright, or we might have been preserved from sitting here like an animated flower-show all the evening under that supercilious stare."

This was manifestly unjust, as Olin had re-

moved his gaze as soon as he had bowed to these acquaintances.

"People will think you are trying to be an 'American Beauty' yourself," returned Helen laughing, "unless you moderate the fireworks in your eyes and let your cheeks grow cool. It is a pity that you are n't sitting next the doctor instead of Vernon. The usual paralysis seems to have seized her, and I think a little repression would be blessed to you. Oh, there is Miss Norman."

The slight applause in the house swelled to a hearty welcome as a white-robed woman appeared on the stage.

Josephine forgot her annoyance in an absorbing interest in the famous pianist, and found herself applauding with the rest as the graceful woman acknowledged the greeting.

Miss Norman carried a large bouquet of red and white roses, which she laid upon the piano before she took her seat and ran her fingers over the keys.

Instantly the house became hushed, and the movement from a sonata, with which the pianist began her programme, fell upon profound stillness.

Helen stole a glance at Miss Charlotte. She wore the same absorbed and adoring expression with which she watched Dickie weave mats. Evidently where Miss Charlotte gave her heart she gave it without reserve.

The programme went on amid alternations on the part of the audience of absolute silence and that peculiar splitting sound of spontaneous ap-

plause which is high tribute to a performer. A vocal number divided the first half of the evening into two parts and then came an intermission. Dr. Latimer leaned forward in his seat and caught Josephine's eye.

"Should you like to meet Miss Norman?" he asked.

"I am not sure. You know best," she added doubtfully.

"I should like you all to meet her," said the doctor, and a moment afterward, Charlotte Norman's curiosity was aroused by seeing his tall figure, followed by the three girls, move up the aisle.

"See that, Olin," she remarked triumphantly, "it's just as I expected. I imagine Dr. Latimer won't try that again. Those girls are tired of it and he is taking them home. What we escaped! Is n't Agnes outdoing herself to-night?"

Mr. Randolph looked after the retreating figures and saw them turn after they had reached the outside row of seats.

"I think he is taking them to see Aunt Agnes," he said.

Miss Norman turned with a jerk to follow his glance. "It can't be. What an idea! Well, if it was anybody but Dr. Latimer I should say I never heard of such impertinence. As it is, he knows very well Agnes does not like to see people during intermission, and I think it is outrageous."

"Well, Aunt Agnes can't blame you for it."

"You don't seem to see the point," responded

Miss Charlotte impatiently. "What do I care whom she blames? I don't want her fatigued and annoyed by three strange girls who will gush over her, — just what she dislikes most."

"You may be sure Dr. Latimer knows his ground," returned Olin coolly. "He is not apt to make mistakes."

The doctor led his charges through the stage door and by a narrow flight of steps to a room where the star of the evening sat chatting with a few persons whose faces were familiar in Boston's musical circles.

At sight of Dr. Latimer she rose, and the doctor, after bowing to the others of the group, took her offered hand.

She looked beyond him with a gracious glance at his companions. "These are the young ladies you told me of," she said.

Dr. Latimer introduced the girls and she shook hands with each in an informal and cordial manner.

"We have been neighbors a long time," she said. "It is time we met. Your fame has preceded you, I assure you. Miss Helen and Miss Vernon are household words with our little boy. I believe you, Miss Ivison," turning to Josephine, "come into the city every day like myself. It is a wonder we have n't learned one another's faces on the cars before this."

"I suppose our hours are different," replied Josephine. "I have to take an early start every day."

"I wish we might meet that way," continued

Miss Norman, "for it is very nearly my only opportunity to visit with my friends."

"I know you must be fully occupied. I shall be tempted to miss a car or two sometimes after this to try to take yours. It would be a pleasure to me," replied Josephine, her tone adding emphasis to her words.

"Dr. Latimer was so kind to bring us to-night," said Helen. "We never heard you play before, and it is a year since we have heard any good music."

Her transparent face shone with happiness as she spoke, and indeed Miss Norman seldom received more acceptable flattery than that shining from the three pairs of honest girlish eyes bent upon her.

Dr. Latimer, standing by, watching the group, received a smile from her. "Thank you for my lovely roses, doctor. Do you see I am carrying red ones with them to-night? Olin was moved to an extraordinary bit of attentiveness, and I could not slight his gift."

Josephine followed her gesture and observed the mass of roses she indicated. The delicate blossoms that lay among the splendid glow of the richer roses were Dr. Latimer's gift, then. The girl again felt resentful, and it occurred to her that Mr. Randolph must have gone to a florist and ordered the contents of an entire rosehouse. She felt as though she and her sisters were branded with his mark and that Miss Norman must recognize it.

"We must not detain you longer, Agnes," said Dr. Latimer, "and I advise you to dismiss all your friends. The rest of your programme is exacting."

Miss Norman parted graciously from the girls, and Josephine went back to her seat with a strong personal interest in this charming sister of Miss Charlotte. She speculated concerning her age, which she guessed was about forty, and dwelt upon her gracious and pleasing manner. As she listened to the following numbers performed by the pianist, it was not so much Miss Norman's delicacy, power, correctness, and artistic feeling which held this listener, as the fact that Dr. Latimer had called her Agnes, and sent her white roses.

CHAPTER X.

DR. LATIMER ENTERTAINS.

HELEN and Vernon had shared a sleeping-room since the engaging of a servant, and that evening the youngest waited until Josephine's door was safely closed before she turned to her sister with a large-eyed and confidential expression.

"Dr. Latimer never sent us our roses at all," she announced in a hushed and portentous tone.

"How do you know?"

"He said so when I thanked him for mine. You and Josephine were talking so busily you did n't notice, and I begged him not to say anything, for I knew Josephine would be piping if she suspected that" —

"That what?" Helen met her sister's gaze as she paused, with an amused expression.

Vernon smiled and her eyes danced with pleasure. "Why, I suspect somebody, don't you?"

"Yes; so does Josephine."

"No! And did n't cast the flowers from her and dance on them in the aisle? I can't believe it."

"Yes, she suspected our mistake, and so did I as soon as we saw what Miss Norman was wearing; but of course we could n't be sure."

"No, and that I suppose explains Josephine's moderation; but you're sure now, are n't you?" added Vernon triumphantly.

"Oh, yes; and I think Josephine felt pretty certain, too."

"Then what do you suppose she has done with her roses. I'll warrant they're not in her room with her." Vernon took a lighted candle and went into the dining-room.

Helen could hear her softly prowling about, and presently she returned with a handful of blossoms which were hanging their lovely heads dejectedly.

"Just as I expected," she announced. "She had dumped them on a chair in the schoolroom. Give me yours and I will float them all together."

But the speaker did not suit the action exactly to the word. One of the roses she had worn was not permitted to lie with its sisters in the bowl of refreshing water. Instead, it was placed, at a moment when Helen was not looking, in a certain box in Vernon's drawer.

"Dr. Latimer said he could not allow you and Josephine to give him thanks which he did not deserve, and I thought he looked a little surprised when I asked him not to undeceive you just then!"

"I wonder if he suspected Mr. Randolph?" queried Helen.

"He must have, after we found Miss Agnes carrying the same sort as her sister and ourselves. He knows Mr. Bruch could n't have done it."

"No, indeed, poor man," sighed Helen gently.

"And there is n't anybody else, worse luck," continued Vernon. "What fun it must be for those girls who are receiving flowers all the time."

"Well, how did you satisfy Dr. Latimer?"

"Oh, I promised to tell you both later. I fancy he knew I was afraid of Josephine, for I stuttered and stammered when I tried to say something about her in connection with the matter. Then I thought to explain things a little for Mr. Randolph, so I told the doctor how Miss Norman came over to invite us and how strangely she acted, and I imagine he saw through the whole thing. I think it is real romantic, Helen, don't you?" added Vernon delightedly.

Helen laughed. "A nice, safe, impartial, three-cornered sort of romantic — yes," she answered.

"Well," said Vernon, laughing too, but not derisively, "don't you know there usually are three princesses in a fairy tale?"

"Yes, but one is always phenomenally ugly and in league with bad fairies, and I object to filling that rôle."

"You — you little dear! Oh, Josephine can do that all right. I'm not certain that fire and smoke are n't issuing from her nostrils now if she is reflecting upon Mr. Randolph's nerve."

"Nerve is slang, Vernon, and princesses never use it."

"Don't you think he looks and moves like a prince, Helen?"

"Never saw one," replied Helen sleepily, turning over on her pillow.

"Well, is n't Olin a lovely name? Does n't it make you think of the viking Norsemen, big and broad, who might have been his ancestors?"

"I guess you are thinking of Odin; but he looks cold enough," murmured Helen through her nose, "to have descended from an iceberg."

"But that is just the beauty of him, — don't you think so? Pshaw!" after waiting a moment in vain for a reply. "She is asleep. Never mind, I am the youngest princess, and all the nicest things always happen to her," and with this consoling reflection Vernon, too, composed herself for slumber and was soon in the land of dreams.

After this evening followed many monotonous days at the little flat. The weather was disagreeable with wind and rain. Some of the children were detained at home by reason of it, and the rest had to be employed indoors throughout the session. Josephine, who enjoyed her work less than Helen did hers, came home in sober mood at night, and all three sisters had less heart than usual for the daily read and talk around the evening lamp.

Not since his unsuccessful attempt at making a cat's-paw of his aunt had Mr. Randolph made any overtures toward the girls, who, with the exception of the youngest, gave little thought to him. Mr. Bruch was ill with a cold. Dr. Latimer, too, had remained away. Miss Charlotte had not visited the kindergarten, and Josephine had not happened on Agnes Norman's horse-car.

Altogether, the girls were quite ready to appreciate a break in the monotony of their existence, when an invitation arrived bidding them to dine on a certain evening with Dr. Latimer.

Helen was the only one of the three who had seen the interior of the doctor's house, and it was with an almost reverent curiosity that Josephine approached the square stone building, set back from the street in the roomy inclosure where it had been erected more than fifty years before.

Vernon was wishing that Mr. Randolph might have been invited, but she kept that reflection to herself. He had evidently forgotten their existence. It would have been so easy for him to run over on some of those occasions when he visited the Normans, but he never did so, and as her sisters did not seem to miss him she would be discreet enough not to let it appear that she did.

Dr. Latimer met his guests at the door and gave them into the charge of a maid, who led them upstairs to a sleeping-room to remove their wraps. Josephine looked about her with a sensation of having every expectation fulfilled. The delicate neatness, the harmonious coloring, belonged to the home which the doctor would create. Below-stairs there were fine paintings and etchings, pure marbles and rare articles of vertu. The fire that lent its glow to the room burned for Josephine upon an altar. The quiet and restfulness of the house seemed to her a tangible charm, the more powerful that she knew how rarely its owner enjoyed it.

She had learned from several sources how great a part of his life was spent among scenes which needed the disarming and consoling peace of his presence, and knew that although wealth was represented in these surroundings to which he withdrew for recuperation, much greater wealth was expended in personal effort to right wrong and uplift the fallen.

The host's pleasure in the presence of his guests was unmistakable. It shone in his eyes as he quietly welcomed them again when they entered the parlor and asked them how they had fared since he last saw them.

"I have been too busy of late to come to see you," he said, when Helen had given him as cheerful an account as she could, "and the weather has been so persistently wet that I finally succumbed to a cough which kept me a prisoner for a day or two and for which I am in Persis' bad graces." The doctor smiled and the color fluctuated in his cheeks. "We do not always agree as to my duty, but when I at last thought of this means of cheering my imprisonment she was good enough to accede to my plan very willingly."

"We did not know you were ill," returned Josephine anxiously, perceiving for the first time through the irradiation of his countenance that there were hollows under his eyes, and realizing for the first time the slightness of his physique. A sort of panic seized her. Supposing, in the vague language of apprehensive hearts, "anything were to happen to" Dr. Latimer!

But he was shaking his head. "I have had no illness of any account, — just enough to give me a holiday in my library while I kept the peace with Persis by remaining in-doors. Vernon, do you like to look at pictures?"

It was the first time the speaker had dropped the prefix from one of the girls' names, but Josephine was the only one who noticed it, — noticed it with envy of the favored youngest.

Upon Vernon's assenting, the host led her to a broad bay-window at the rear of the room where stood a table with portfolios of views.

"You can visit several countries by means of these," he said. "Just make a choice."

But at this moment there was a rustle at the door, and, looking up, Dr. Latimer saw Mr. Bruch's military figure and genial countenance. "Excuse me a minute," he said, and advanced to welcome the newcomer.

"Ah, doctor, this is the first place where I find sunshine in one week," declared the German as they shook hands; "and here are the young ladies." Mr. Bruch greeted Josephine and Helen, and then politely sought Vernon in her remote situation before returning to his host.

"I am glad you are able to be out again," said Josephine. "They have had a hard time without you at school."

"Yes, I know; but my throat was so sore as it could be," replied the professor. "I will be more careful now."

"We have missed you, too," said Helen gently.

"You are so kind," returned Mr. Bruch eagerly and gratefully. "It seems one year that I do not go to your house."

But now something occurred which astonished the sisters in varying degree and kind. Miss Charlotte Norman, Miss Agnes Norman, and Mr. Randolph entered the room. A twinge of disappointment seized Josephine. It was then not true, as she had supposed, that Dr. Latimer had invited herself and her sisters to a cozy meal. The affair had stretched to the dimensions of a dinner-party. It did not occur to her then that the host, with very little thought of himself in the matter, might have arranged to bring the neighbors into more social relations for the girls' good; but she rebuked herself for egotism, and perceiving at once in Miss Charlotte's candid countenance that the surprise of this meeting was mutual, she arose and assuming a neutral expression waited for her cue.

Miss Norman hesitated, and Agnes passed her and crossed to Josephine.

"How good this is of the doctor," she said, making it evident that she was pleased; "for you and I have found horse-car visiting a failure. have n't we?"

Josephine responded brightly; the film of ice was broken, and general greetings were interchanged.

Dr. Latimer before the evening of Miss Norman's recital had visited her at her music-room,

and, asking permission to introduce the girls, had declared his interest in them with the effect to enlist the busy woman's good-will.

Dr. Latimer shook hands cordially with Olin, whom he had not met since the evening at the Ivisons'.

"Is this a reward for virtuous conduct?" inquired the young man imperturbably.

"You know best as to that," replied the host.

Olin smiled; then, advancing, bowed formally to Josephine and Helen and entered into conversation with Bruch.

"Does n't he care whether I'm here or not?" thought Vernon, gazing at a view of Unter den Linden and listening for a step which she considered should by this time be turned in her direction.

At last curiosity overcame pride and she looked into the other room. Dr. Latimer observed her.

"Here are some more friends, Vernon," he said. "You shall go back to your pictures presently;" and the girl rose perforce and came forward.

"Well, I never!" thought Miss Charlotte, noting the familiar address and fixing her gold eye-glasses upon her nose to look at the youngest with new curiosity. From Vernon her gaze was transferred to Josephine, then in turn to Helen.

They were three neatly dressed, pleasant-looking girls, she thought, and appeared at ease in the present surroundings.

Dr. Latimer was smiling upon Vernon with what a stranger might have guessed to be fatherly affec-

tion. Agnes was chatting to Josephine as if to an old friend. It all ruffled Miss Charlotte, who instinctively recoiled from intimate relations with people whose immediate ancestors were not either present or accounted for. Even Dr. Latimer's seal of approval was not wholly sufficient for her. He was only a man after all, and could not be expected to know as a woman would where to draw the line in his kind treatment of these strangers.

She suddenly found Helen smiling at her. What a gentle, frank face the girl had! What a smooth, open brow! An excellent face for a kindergarten. Miss Charlotte approved of Helen so heartily in her proper sphere that even now her countenance softened a little and the girl crossed over and took a seat near her.

"Did Dickie get wet going home to-day?" she asked. "I saw him walk through a puddle and rapped on the window at him, but he is so proud of his high rubber boots he likes to make use of them."

"Yes, he came in rather muddy," replied Miss Norman, "but I suppose boys will be boys."

"And so will girls, when it comes to a mud-puddle," laughed Helen. "I always dread to see the water gather in the street, for I know all my children will want to get their feet into it before they go home. I presume," looking up at Olin, who had drawn near, "that stage of life has not entirely passed from your memory, Mr. Randolph?"

"I deny that I ever had such an affinity for

dirt as Dickie," returned Olin. "I saw you at my aunt's recital, Miss Ivison. What a pleasant occasion it was."

"I can't tell you how we enjoyed it," replied Helen, "for you are never so music-hungry as we were and you could n't understand. I have never had an opportunity, Miss Norman, to thank you for inviting us that day."

Charlotte glanced up at her nephew, but his impassive face suggested nothing. "Mr. Randolph deserves the thanks for that invitation," she returned.

"Indeed? Then please accept them, Mr. Randolph," said Helen.

Olin bowed without speaking.

"Does n't that explain, then," added the girl, meeting his eyes frankly, "the very pleasant mystery of the beautiful roses we received that day?"

Miss Norman looked from her nephew to Helen and back again.

Olin bowed, and although he was an unsmiling young man a smile came upon his lips by reason of the exceeding and stony amazement with which his aunt was regarding him.

"I managed that rather clumsily," he said, "but my excuse is that I was in great haste that day. I had no intention of being anonymous, but I did n't happen to have a card with me, and I supposed we should meet in the evening."

"We thank you so much," returned Helen, the more hurriedly that her sensitive conscience

pricked her for thus including Josephine ; then she added to make her statement more truthful : "Vernon and I took the greatest care of the flowers, and kept them alive as long as we could."

Miss Norman remained speechless. Had all her world gone crazy about these girls and she alone remained sane ? A mortifying conviction seized her that her own and Agnes' roses were only given that Olin might have excuse for the attention to these others. "Oh well," she thought, to console herself, "I suppose young men in these days send flowers to young women on all occasions."

It was a relief to her that now dinner was announced.

Dr. Latimer's dining-room and table, the way the latter was arranged and the manner in which the dinner was served, were all characteristic of the tastes of the host.

Persis was wont to say that although the doctor did not believe in eating for himself, he believed everybody else should eat, and when he entertained his friends he entertained them well.

After the company were seated at the table Dr. Latimer bowed his head and offered this brief petition : —

"Bless to our use, O Lord, what Thy bounty hath provided, and give us thankful hearts. Amen."

The girls were to eat many meals with their host hereafter, and some whose frugality would be in strong contrast to the delicate feast of to-day,

but always the quiet fervor of that blessing, ending with "and give us thankful hearts," seemed to make aught but thankfulness ignoble and to hallow the simplest fare.

"You have not done right, doctor, to keep it from us that you were ill," said Miss Charlotte, who sat at the host's right hand.

"It was nothing of any importance," he rejoined.

Miss Norman shook her head incredulously. "Persis told me you had had fever when she was over yesterday."

"Persis often makes much ado about nothing when she can find a sympathetic ear. She does not quite dare to scold me as much as she wishes, so my friends are victims of the overflow of her feelings. I confess that time has seemed long, and there have been evenings the last week when I have thought with favor of recent theories concerning the therapeutic value of music."

The speaker looked at Agnes.

"Why didn't you send for me?" she asked reproachfully. "You know I am comparatively at leisure now in the evening, and I would always rather play for you than not when I can."

"I thought it a great deal to ask."

Agnes gave him an expressive look.

"This is the lady that Miss Iverson tells me of," said Mr. Bruch, turning his spectacles upon Agnes, "who plays upon the piano and upon the hearts of the Boston public."

"The very same," returned the doctor, "and

she has emboldened me so much during the last five minutes that I shall dare ask her to show you this evening how she does it."

Agnes shook her head. "Dr. Latimer only needs emboldening when the question is one of his own private pleasure," she said. "However, he knows that this is the time of year when I am most good-natured. Is n't it so, doctor?"

"Yes. Miss Norman's heart is in the home where she spends her summers, Mr. Bruch. It is a little island off the coast of Maine, and because she knows that next month the rolling fields will be carpeted with violets and strawberry blossoms, and almost ready to receive her, she begins to feel jubilant."

"Mr. Randolph is getting ready to say something crushing," observed Agnes, looking at her nephew; then turning to Josephine, who was seated next her, she added explanatorily: "Mr. Randolph despises this 'rocky, sterile, desert isle,' as he is pleased to term my paradise."

"Indeed? Then where is the island he is so enthusiastic about? I thought it was the one where you had your cottage."

Olin became suddenly deaf, and passed the olives to Vernon, who was his next neighbor.

"No, indeed, it can't be ours. Why, Olin, have you set up an island, too?" asked his aunt.

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Randolph bent toward the speaker with his blankest, most impenetrable expression.

"Miss Ivison tells me there is an island dear to your heart."

"Why, Mr. Randolph, have you forgotten the photographs you showed us?" suggested Vernon, with the friendly desire to jog an apparently latent memory. "I have n't forgotten that pretty wood road, where you said the air was so sweet, and the coves that you described as so picturesque, and the social row of cottages, with Dr. Latimer's in the middle."

"Why, it is our island," said Agnes, laughing and gazing with merry, curious eyes at her non-committal nephew. "I think Mr. Randolph must have been enjoying his own eloquence, Miss Vernon. Olin," she continued, "I remember one occasion when you were a small boy, when you told a fib and your mother talked to you long and seriously on the subject. At last you were in a properly contrite frame of mind, and, anxious to agree with your mother's views, you observed tearfully: 'I have always heard that honesty is next to policy!' Are you of that opinion still, and if so, what was your policy in this instance?"

She paused and regarded him mischievously.

"The island is a very pleasant place," returned Mr. Randolph calmly. "When you and Aunt Charlotte are about, the air is so heavy with superlatives that I do what I can to clear the atmosphere, but" —

"It won't do, Olin," interrupted his aunt. "You are arranging matters, as summer ap-

proaches, to be invited to the Nautilus ; but this sudden change of heart is suspicious. I will not have you."

"Pardon me. You did not allow me to finish. I was about to observe that the island is a charming spot when one regards it from Boston. A nearer view is disenchanting."

Agnes laughed, and Dr. Latimer smiled at his plate.

During the evening Miss Norman did play for the assembled company, and altogether the occasion was one which the girls sat up late discussing after they reached home.

"I have a conundrum to ask," announced Vernon, as they sat around the dying embers in the schoolroom. "Why did n't Dr. Latimer and Miss Agnes Norman marry each other long ago?"

"Everybody in the world does n't have to be married," returned Josephine quickly.

"I confess I thought of it," remarked Helen reflectively. "They are just the right age for each other, and it is evident that they are close and old friends. Do you remember when he was seized with that spasm of coughing and had to leave the room? I happened to be talking with Miss Agnes and she immediately interrupted me, unconsciously, I know, and began to say how anxious it made all the doctor's friends to have him ill, and although she pretended to rub her eyes I saw that tears had started in them."

"I wonder if he is a widower or a bachelor," mused Vernon. "I mean to ask Persis."

"No, you must not, Vernon," said Josephine. "It would n't be proper, really, to show any such curiosity about a man who has been so extraordinarily kind to us. See how he works for our interest. Miss Agnes Norman would not be so cordial but for him. I should n't wonder if he gave that dinner to-night to place us socially a little higher in Miss Charlotte's opinion. He brought Mr. Bruch in because he knew Miss Agnes was in a way to know of students who might want German lessons. I am sure of that, because he recommended his work to her in my hearing."

"And how well she talked German to Mr. Bruch," observed Helen. "It is hard not to envy such an accomplished being as she is. "Still, she has earned it all by hard work."

"Yes, but circumstances permitted her to rise," said Josephine, repressing a sigh. "She did not have to spend all her girlhood giving music lessons instead of studying."

Helen squeezed her sister's hand in silent sympathy.

"I think we are wonderfully fortunate to have made such friends," added Josephine, with hasty cheerfulness.

"Long live Dr. Latimer!" yawned Vernon behind her hand, and then they broke up the council and retired.

CHAPTER XI.

AU REVOIR.

THE month of May continued relentless that year. The famed Boston east winds sought and chilled the marrow in one's bones. The rain pelted; yet Mother Nature with marvelous punctuality encouraged her little leaves not to defer their engagement on account of the weather, and they unfolded bravely, scarcely noticed until, when a shining, windless day finally dawned, it was perceived that the country was fair with tender green.

Vacation had begun for Helen and was almost here for Josephine. Dr. Latimer came with his carriage and took the girls to drive in the late pleasant afternoons.

Agnes Norman learned the way into their home; but so long as she remained in the city she seemed to find but little time for herself or her neighbors.

Dickie Starbird clattered up the stairs daily to see his dear Miss Helen, and one afternoon he threw his arms about her neck with extra fervor.

"Good-by," he cried; "you won't see me any more."

"Are you going away, Dickie?" asked Helen.

"Yep, going to the island to-morrow."

“‘Yes, Miss Helen,’ you should say, dear. Are both your aunts going?”

“No, just Aunt Charlotte. Aunt Agnes is coming pretty soon, though. We are going first to get the house ready.”

“You are glad to go, are n’t you, Dickie?”

“Oh, yes, indeed, but I wish you were coming.”

“You must n’t forget me, Dickie. The summer will go quickly, and then I hope your aunt will let you come back to me. I don’t think you need to go to another school yet.”

“‘Ain’t going to any other school,” announced Dickie with nonchalant finality, and with another hug and kiss he was gone.

“Well,” remarked Helen the next morning at breakfast, “the Normans go to-day, — practically all of them, for Miss Agnes is going to spend a week or so with a friend. Miss Norman came in and left her good-bys for you both. It is going to be lonely without them.”

“And without Dr. Latimer. He will be off soon,” suggested Vernon.

“Let us not think about it,” said Josephine. “Let us think of all the pleasant outdoor things we can do together here.”

“And, besides, we never expected to have any such friends when we first came. I dare say we can get along,” added Vernon boldly. “I wonder where Mr. Randolph will spend his vacation. His aunts won’t have him.”

“Poor young man,” observed Helen. “We

might allow him to rusticate in our schoolroom through the hot season."

Vernon laughed. "We shall be quite warm enough, I suspect, so near this flat roof."

It was that morning that Persis mounted the stairs again to visit the "orphans."

She was warmly welcomed by Helen and Vernon. Their sister was at school.

"Thought I'd have to come and say good-by," she announced, breathing heavily.

"I'm so glad you did," replied the girls in unison. "I suppose you enjoy this change in the summer. Do you always go with the doctor?" asked Helen.

"Ever since he's been goin' to the island I have. That's only three years, you know, and glad I am to get him off always. The fish o' the sea and the fowls o' the air are pretty much the only things in creation that don't work him too hard; and since he's stopped practicin' med'cine he's willin' to make a pretty good stay away from town."

"Have you kept house for Dr. Latimer a good while?" asked Vernon.

"Quite a spell. You see, when he was a boy his ma had a house in the country where I was raised. She used to come there summers and she used to get me in to help take care o' the doctor. Well, she always took an interest in me and I always took an interest in her, but I lost sight of her while the doctor was gettin' his education. They was in Europe a long spell, and then Mis'

Latimer died sudden. Quite a while afterwards the doctor came out to our place to see about sellin' the country house, and I, hearin' he was there, went to see him. I had n't seen him for years, but he was just as pleasant as though we 'd parted yesterday.

" 'Where you goin' to live now, Paul?' says I. 'In the same old place,' says he. 'Don't you want to come and keep house for me, Persis?' Well, I looked at him and think says I, you 're goin' to be most awfully imposed upon, alone as you are, if I don't, think says I, so says I, right off, without waitin' more 'n a flash, 'Yes, I do,' says I. He looked surprised, and I wan't sure whether he was pleased or not, but I knew what was good for him and I made up my mind then and there to do for him till I saw he could better himself. So the up-shot of it is I'm there yet, for he very soon showed he was glad I come, and I think I've done well by him."

Persis smoothed her dress with her silk-gloved hands and beamed upon the girls, who regarded her with interest.

"You do the cooking?" asked Helen.

"I should think I did. Do you suppose I'd let anybody else cook the doctor's victuals? I do the cookin' and hire the help and — well, I guess I'm what they call a workin' housekeeper."

"And we found out how you can cook at the dinner the other night," remarked Vernon.

"Oh, yes; I made it my business to learn how

to do things when I see the doctor needed lookin' after, for I was bound he should n't have a chance to wish I was n't there. I hain't got long to stay this mornin'," added Miss Applebee. "I just thought as I was passin' I'd look in and say good-by. We're off to-morrow."

"It was very kind of you," replied Helen, and both girls shook the plump hand and received a kindly glance of the bright gray eyes.

"I hope you'll enjoy your vacation first-rate," said Persis, "but I'm some afraid you'll find these rooms hot come July. Why can't you take your beds down to the lower flat?"

"It is engaged at last," answered Vernon. "We are going to have neighbors this summer."

"Here's hopin' they'll be clever folks," responded Persis earnestly. "Give my good-by to your sister."

"So Dr. Latimer leaves town to-morrow?" said Josephine when she returned and Miss Applebee's information had been rehearsed to her. "Then he will be likely to come to take us for a last drive this afternoon."

"Do you know what I have been thinking?" asked Vernon confidentially. "Would n't it be nice if Dr. Latimer would ask us to exercise his horses during the summer?"

"It would, indeed," replied Helen; "but he will not. He probably sends them into the country to have as good a rest as he has himself."

"Oh, girls, I am afraid it is clouding up," ex-

claimed Josephine anxiously. "Won't it be too bad if it rains and he can't take us this last day!"

Josephine's fears were realized. The sky grew darker and presently the drops began to fall. Faster and thicker they came, and the shower did not abate until sunset.

Supper was over and Josephine stood by the window in the twilight.

"I shall not see Dr. Latimer again," she said, turning to look where she and Vernon always looked for comfort, — namely, at Helen.

"That is so, and it is just as hard for Helen and me as it is for you," remarked Vernon resignedly. "I have been hoping up to the last that he would say something nice about the horses."

"You will see him to-morrow, but I shall be at school," replied Josephine. "He will not leave town without coming. Be sure to ask him how long he is going to stay. Perhaps he will stay a month."

"The idea," scoffed Vernon, "of his coming back before August."

"Well, two months, then."

"Oh, no. It is very warm in September. He will stay three months, probably."

"But that is a quarter of a year," returned Josephine; facing about sharply.

Vernon gave a careless laugh. "Well, I'll tell him that he must not stay so long," she answered, seating herself by Helen and laying her head in her sister's lap.

There was a long silence while the shadows gathered close and closer.

"Girls, we must get on without anybody but ourselves," said Josephine at last, turning back from the window and speaking firmly. "This looking outside for our contentment will not do at all. Now, I have no doubt that we shall have — what was that? I thought I heard a step" —

"Well, so you did," remarked Vernon. "Somebody is venturing to walk along the sidewalk, and the window being open you heard it. You were saying?"

"That we shall have a — delightful — a very pleasant — there is somebody coming upstairs, girls. Who can it be?"

Helen pushed Vernon gently aside, and rising opened the door. "It is too bad the gas is not lighted. Excuse me, but who" — she paused interrogatively.

"It is I, Miss Helen. I have a match right here." Dr. Latimer lighted the gas. "You were enjoying blindman's holiday."

"Yes. The twilight is so long now it betrays us into carelessness. Josephine, can you find a match? It looks black coming out of the hall."

"In just a minute; I am not sure" —

"Don't trouble yourself, Miss Josephine: I've another right here," and the doctor lighted the burners in the schoolroom.

"We were afraid when the rain came we should miss you altogether," said Vernon, "for Persis told us you were going to-morrow."

"I should not have gone without seeing you," returned the doctor, as he seated himself, "although I don't believe much in good-bys."

"If you had not come," said Josephine, "we should have been very sorry. Good-bys are not agreeable, but they are better than nothing."

Dr. Latimer looked pleased. "Good-by in this case would suit me so little," he answered, "that I want to say *au revoir* instead."

"With all our hearts," returned Helen. "How long do you usually stay at your summer home?"

She cast a glance at Josephine, but the latter's eyes were upon the doctor with so absorbed an expression that she was not heeded.

"I am lawless about that," replied the visitor. "I stay sometimes until the Sea Shell is unable to shelter me any longer. Persis tells me you are to have neighbors downstairs."

"Yes," said Josephine, "and I fancy that during the season of open windows that fact will cause us to spend considerable time in the parks."

"Perhaps the fact will help incline you to listen to my plan," observed Dr. Latimer, his eyes looking from one to another of the young faces. "I came to-night to ask you if you would like to visit me at the island this summer. I am not at all sure you would like it," he added, his smile flashing forth and the color coming and going in his face, as the pleased and startled exclamations broke from Helen and Vernon.

Josephine's position did not change, but some

inner feeling illumined her countenance as a strong light might burst into glow within a white vase.

"How good of you to ask us!" exclaimed Helen gratefully.

"Of course we should like it!" added Vernon excitedly.

Dr. Latimer bent his steady eyes upon the eldest. "I suppose Miss Josephine is the arbiter of our fate," he said. "What are your sentiments in the matter?"

"I would rather go there than anywhere in the world," replied the girl, so seriously that the doctor laughed and raised his eyebrows.

"Mr. Randolph would be surprised to learn what a convert he made. I should really be very sorry to have your anticipations high, for the island is so quiet and life there so simple that your going would be an experiment. The trouble is that, being my guests, you will not like to tell me if you are discontented."

The speaker looked from one to the other questioningly.

"We would promise to be honest," returned Helen with a little reassuring nod.

"Besides, Dr. Latimer," added Josephine with unchanged seriousness, "you know people do not have to tell you things."

Her sisters laughed and the visitor smiled.

"Then you will come," he said. "I have spoken to Persis about your servant Lena, and she suggests that you allow her to come to my house

and be a companion for the girl I shall leave there. Send any valuables you may wish taken care of to my house also, as you are not sure of the new people below. Then Lena can come here occasionally and air the rooms and take a look at things."

Before the doctor left, every arrangement was perfected. The girls were to leave Boston the first of July. The parting with him was very different from that which they had anticipated, and when he was gone Josephine put an arm about each of her sisters in mute contentment.

"Does n't it almost seem as though we were deserting Mr. Bruch?" asked Helen regretfully. "Poor man! I am afraid he will have a lonely summer."

"Don't worry," returned Vernon. "It is more than likely that Dr. Latimer has provided some asylum for him, too. Is n't it a pity that Mr. Randolph only likes the island from an æsthetic point of view, and not for practical visiting?"

Josephine looked from one to the other, her radiant smile and softly beaming eyes expressing more than her words. "Nothing is a pity to-night," she said.

"It will be awfully poky there, as like as not," objected Vernon doubtfully; "and even if I don't like it I suppose I shall have to stay if you do."

"The majority shall decide," answered Josephine.

"Then it will simply depend on which of us can tease the harder," answered Vernon, half-vexed,

half-laughing ; " for Helen will only want what we want."

" I thank you very much," observed Helen with as much dignity as was compatible with the fact that her sisters were kissing her simultaneously, one on the right and one on the left cheek ; " I have some mind of my own, and having a little intelligence I am not going to refuse an offer of a visit to the seashore with all my expenses paid, and I advise you, Vernon, not to croak."

It was a couple of days afterward that the youngest met Mr. Randolph on the street again, and she could hardly wait to pass the ordinary courtesies of the occasion before surprising him with her news.

" We are going to the island," she announced, endeavoring to give her information in a matter-of-course manner.

" Indeed ?" Olin was astonished and showed it. " By my aunt's invitation ?"

" No ; oh, no."

" Ah, going to the Fountain House, then."

" I did n't know there was a Fountain House."

" Certainly. Electric lights, elevator, fountain in the court surrounded by palms and tropical plants and all that."

" Well, we are n't going there. Guess again."

" Dr. Latimer ?"

" Right." Vernon nodded. " Is n't he dear ? It is fortunate I met you, for as you never call upon us any more I should n't have seen you otherwise to say good-by."

"No, I admit I have not been neighborly. I have burned all your sister Josephine's pressing invitations to visit you." After an impressive pause he added: "I told you long ago that I suspected the Iverson heart to be a hard one. Now I know it."

"Have you stayed away on that account?" asked Vernon, looking at him reflectively, a good deal consoled.

He shook his head. "No," he answered, "not wholly."

Vernon blushed quickly. "Please yourself, by all means," she said, beginning to walk on.

"I am not allowed to," answered Olin coolly.

"Oh, indeed," said Vernon, her eyes sparkling. "Well, be sure to obey auntie, whatever you do."

Randolph stared and then laughed. "It is n't auntie. You don't seem to understand that my business may demand midnight oil."

"You" — began Vernon, and then paused. "Good-by," she added, holding out her hand.

"What were you going to say?"

"Nothing, — which is what you say most of the time you are talking." She laughed, still vexed.

Mr. Randolph suddenly reassumed his bored, impenetrable expression, and touched her offered hand formally.

"Good-by. Be kind enough to give my best wishes for a pleasant summer to your sisters," he said.

Vernon felt startled and chilled by his manner, and with an automatic adieu allowed him to leave her and passed on her way.

But the sun shone dully, the green of the grass had faded, and there was a faint dismay at her heart; so, being, as her sister had said, very child-like, and but little restrained as yet by the fetters of conventionality, she suddenly threw them off, and turning about hurried after Olin, who heard himself addressed by a rather breathless, girlish voice: —

“Oh, Mr. Randolph.”

He turned in surprise and lifted his hat.

“I wanted to — I did n't mean” — Vernon swallowed. She felt vaguely that the regulation youngest princess would never be reduced to straits like this, and that the prince would be more in his place on one knee at her feet than looking down upon her from such a superior height, while he waited seriously for the words that stuck in her throat.

“That was very impertinent — what I said,” she managed to utter at last. “I'm sorry.”

Confronted by this apology Mr. Randolph was for a moment at a loss for words.

“I meant it in a way, you know,” continued straightforward Vernon. “You never say what you mean, and I never know whether you mean what you say or not, and that is very provoking, you see.”

“Why, this is handsome of you, very handsome

indeed," observed Olin, smiling. "You're a nice child."

"Upon my word!" thought Vernon, unpleasantly disconcerted. "Just as I was falling in love with him to have him call me a child!"

"Well, good-by, again, then, if you have forgiven me," she said aloud, her cheeks very prettily pink and a becoming assumption of dignity in her bearing.

Randolph took her hand and pressed it cordially.

"I believe you do not envy us," she said.

"Oh, you're mistaken," returned Olin hastily.

"I really have a high appreciation of the island."

"To be labeled 'sincere' this time?"

"Undoubtedly."

Randolph spoke seriously. As events were shaping themselves it occurred to him that it might be desirable to cultivate that appreciation into a flourishing sentiment.

CHAPTER XII.

IN A FOG.

It was the first day of July that the girls turned the key of their flat and gladly departed from Boston. When they left the train at the union depot in Portland, Josephine had in her hand the list of written directions as to how to reach the dock; but the appearance of Dr. Latimer waiting for his guests put an end to all doubts.

"How good of you! We did n't expect you," cried the girls.

"I concluded to come," he replied, looking from one to another with a welcome in his eyes.

"Then the island is a nearer neighbor than I thought," said Helen.

"I came up yesterday and spent the night in Portland," explained the doctor, as he bestowed the girls and their bags in a carriage that was waiting.

They enjoyed the drive across the interesting old city, and, stopping on the way for a hasty lunch, went on to the dock, where the wind blew in with a chill from the water.

"I hope we shall not get a fog," remarked Dr. Latimer. "We are always desirous to have this

ride show off to the best advantage to strangers."

The little steamer *Merriconeag* was presently ready, and the passengers went on board, the doctor having an eye to the girls' trunks, as he knew by experience that baggage sent to this dock had a way of becoming inspired with a spirit of independence, and sometimes preferred taking its summer outing without regard to the destination of its owner.

They were off at last.

The boat steamed against the wind, past the thickly populated islands nearest the mainland. The girls were glad to get shawls out of their straps and put them on.

"Casco Bay is credited with three hundred and sixty-five islands," remarked the doctor, "but that may be stretching a point in order to give one for each day in the year."

"Are n't you cold?" asked Helen, looking up at him as he gazed at the fresh green isles uplifting themselves from the surging waves.

"It is chilly," he returned, "but this salt air never seems to me harmful. I fear, though, my local pride is about to have a blow. We are going into a fog."

Even so. Before the boat was clear of Little Diamond Island, the landscape blurred, and soon only the ghosts of evergreen trees and outlines of rugged shores were discernible through the mist. The girls wrapped their shawls more closely about them and their host seated himself near by.

"There is a cabin," he said doubtfully. "You may be driven to it."

"Not unless you are," returned Josephine, who was beatifically indifferent to wind and weather.

"A bad beginning makes a good ending," he suggested.

"Is this a bad beginning?" she returned, and gave him one of her rare smiles.

Dr. Latimer laughed a little and regarded Vernon, who was looking pensive. "I thought it was. Well, all is you will have to suspend opinions as to this ride. If the fog is about the island, Persis is feeling much disappointed. I must tell you that she has been very active and interested in the plan for your visit. The summer is her vacation as much as mine, and more necessary for her than for me; so I thought it generous in her to enter so wholeheartedly into the arrangement for my guests, and decided to mention it because I wanted you to realize her state of mind."

The girls expressed their appreciation, and the two hours wore away, a part of the time spent in the cabin and a part on deck.

Toward the close of the trip, and while they were waiting for the next shadowy shore to loom out of the fog, a tall, broad man, noticeable for his height and the profusion and snow-whiteness of his hair and beard, approached our group.

Dr. Latimer gave him a welcoming look. "My guests will not get much idea of the island to-day," he remarked.

"Fawg's pretty heavy," returned the old man.

"These are the Misses Ivison, Captain Liph," went on the doctor, and the girls bowed and smiled toward the picturesque head which nodded them a greeting.

"Captain Liph Johnson is one of our neighbors at the island," explained Dr. Latimer. "Did you come to Portland this morning, captain?"

"Yes."

"How was the weather then?"

"Warm and clear," was the reply. "Aunt Charlotte'll be pretty well cut up, 'n Aunt Agnes, too," continued the old fisherman, "'t' think strangers are goin' to git here 'n a fawg. I tell 'm they act as vain o' the island as though they'd made it 'emselves;" and the shoulders of the old giant shook in a silent laugh.

The girls' astonishment to hear the august Miss Charlotte and her famous sister thus referred to was boundless, but there was no more time for talk. The bell rang the signal to land, and with puffing and twisting the steamer drew up to the landing.

Up on the dock the mist seemed lighter. Dr. Latimer, after looking to see that the baggage had not played truant at any of the stopping-places along the route, led the girls to the end of the dock, where a horse and open wagon were waiting on the grass. A man, his back bowed over in an easy attitude, held the reins.

"You got yer friends, I see," remarked the latter conversationally, looking good-naturedly at the girls.

"Yes, safe and sound. These are the Misses Iverson, Captain Amos. This is a brother of Captain Liph whom you met on the boat. I'll drive up in a minute, captain. Just wait till I look for some packages."

Captain Amos, who was smaller and younger than his brother, stepped stiffly to the ground and Dr. Latimer returned to the dock.

Captain Amos watched reflectively while the girls clambered unaided into the high wagon.

"Sorry 't wan't a hahnsomer day f' your sakes," he observed, with the same drawl that had been noticeable in his brother's speech; only whereas Captain Liph's tone was exceptionally round and musical, Captain Amos spoke with a nasal cheerfulness.

"Yes," replied Helen. "We care more for Dr. Latimer's disappointment than our own. What a pretty horse!"

"Yes." Captain Amos looked at the animal with his customary air of reflection. "Dave doos well enough. 'T any rate he don't have t' stand no c'mparison."

"How is that?"

"'Cause there ain't no other hoss on the island."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; an' we ain't had him only a few years. It's jest about three years now sence he was swum over."

"Did they make him swim?" exclaimed Vernon, much interested. "Why?"

Captain Amos' kindly blue eyes twinkled under their hay-colored thatch. "Well, the walkin' ain't much account 'twixt us an' Orr's Island, ye see," he returned; then looked back at his pet.

"There had n't never ben a hoss here till then, an' Dave pretty near scared the critters out o' the'r wits. He could n't go anywheres the first on 't but what th' oxen 'n the cows would kick up their heels an' run away the minute they sot eyes on him; but that's all passed now. They found out he was stiddy enough, come to know him. All right, doctor," as the latter approached. "I 'll fetch the mail."

Captain Amos accordingly vanished and soon returned with a limp leather bag, which he pushed under the wagon-seat, and then the doctor took the reins and the horse started up the hill.

The mist was light enough for the girls to discern the daisied grass and the swallows who, with tireless wing, wove their graceful curves about the wagon and across the fields, now in the air, now circling close to the ground, the steel-blue of their plumage often flashing fearlessly near the girls' cheeks.

Sixty feet above the sea rose the road, and when the doctor reached a level he turned to Vernon, who was beside him on the front seat.

"Too bad you have to take so much on trust," he said; "but when the sun breaks this enchantment you will see better why we love the island, Miss Vernon."

"Oh, you are n't going to begin to call me Miss, again, I hope," exclaimed the girl.

"Did I ever forget my manners so far as to leave off?"

"Yes, and I liked it so much."

"Did you, dear child? Then we will have done with that conventionality for all time. Now," added the doctor, "we come to Maiden Lane."

They drove across a green field into a road nearly as grass-grown.

"Maiden Lane because the Misses Norman live in it?"

"Yes, and Persis, and various others. Women have a monopoly of the island as summer visitors, for, as you see, only an idle man like myself can afford to remain so far from the busy world; but the Normans were the pioneers, and Miss Agnes named the street."

The row of cottages showed through the mist. They backed upon Maiden Lane and were divided by generous plots of ground. The girls strained their curious eyes.

"What is over there?" asked Vernon, nodding toward the blank mist beyond.

"Over there is Casco Bay and the Atlantic Ocean," returned Dr. Latimer, "and here," turning in beside one of the cottages, "is the Sea Shell."

Persis had heard the wheels, and throwing open the door came out upon the piazza.

"Here we are," announced the doctor.

"And welcome as the flowers," returned Persis heartily, coming to the side of the wagon and giv-

ing the girls a hand to descend. "I did n't think 't would be foggy, Miss Josephine," she added in an aggrieved tone, "but what can't be cured must be endured. Come right in by the fire, all of you. Captain Amos be here soon, d'ye think, doctor?"

"Yes, and he understands about the trunks, but he will have to drive down with the mail first. Dave will stand." And the speaker followed his guests across the little piazza and into the living-room of the cottage, upon which the door opened.

A table was spread for tea, and a wood fire blazed on the old andirons that stood under the brick chimney. These andirons were Miss Charlotte's envy and admiration, and had belonged to Persis' ancestors.

A clock which likewise had come from the house-keeper's old home ticked on the other side of the room with a method and exact truth to which it had held undeviatingly for nearly eighty years. Only when it struck the hour was the venerable time-piece unable to conceal its age. It hurried and rattled hoarsely in an uncontrolled sort of way, and one could but feel that it must be mortifying to a staid and respectable individual to be obliged to make such a hysterical exhibition every hour in the twenty-four.

"Have you kept our secret, Persis?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir; an' the fog helped us there; for if it had n't been for that they'd a seen you drive up, sure."

"I thought, Miss Helen," explained the host, "that if the household in which Dickie rules was held ignorant of your arrival until to-morrow it would be quite as comfortable for you."

"Where do they live?" asked Helen, looking curiously at the windows.

"Next door. There comes Captain Amos. Now it will not be long before your trunks are here."

The girls stood near the fire and looked about them with interest. The room they were in ran the full width of the house, and the walls and ceiling were without lath or plaster. Against the clean, smooth, wooden studs hung such decorations as Persis had chosen.

A broad divan, comfortably upholstered in chintz, stood near one window, and a writing-desk and chairs completed the furniture of the room.

Chintz curtains hung before some wooden shelves in one corner, and Persis, pulling the hangings aside, asked the girls to place their wraps and hats within.

"The doctor's room opens out o' that door, an' the kitchen's here, an' now I'll show you where you're goin' to live, if you'd like to see," continued the housekeeper, leading the way up a flight of uncarpeted stairs. The upper floor of the house was one great room, unfinished like those below, and three beds were disposed about it. The brick chimney ran from the parlor up through the centre and disappeared through the sloping roof. Chintz

curtains were hung to provide two dressing-rooms and closets, and the beds and toilet arrangements were exquisitely neat and plainly comfortable.

Vernon looked about her curiously, and above her from eaves to ridge-pole.

"What a funny contrast to Dr. Latimer's house in Boston!" she said.

"But this ain't Dr. Latimer's house, you see," returned Persis, her pleasant face beaming. "No," as the girls looked surprised; "the doctor gave me this house, and says he, 'You're mistress here, Persis,' says he, 'and you shall have things your own way. I'm your guest down here,' says he."

"That makes us the more grateful to you," replied Josephine, "for of course we are your guests, too, and we feel that it was very kind of you to ask us."

"Law! I'm tickled t' think you ain't bakin' under that flat roof," declared Persis. "It'll do you all a sight o' good to be here a spell. This here burer's yours, an' them hooks, an' if there ain't room enough, why, there's plenty more hooks down to Cap'n Amos' store. I hope he'll get your trunks up here 'fore long, for it's more'n likely to rain to-night."

The trunks arrived and the rain, too, but happily in the proper order, and two modest little boxes were safely stowed upstairs before the first drops fell.

The girls were hungry for the supper of hot

mackerel and light biscuit which Persis dispensed to them from her place at the head of the table, and when the meal was finished Josephine began to clear off the dishes and her sisters followed her example.

"Go set down," said Persis good-naturedly. "I don't want you to go to work the first thing."

"No, let us begin right," replied Josephine. "You must let us help you in every way we can, or we can't be happy to stay here. Let us understand each other."

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Miss Applebee, leaning both hands on the table as she spoke. "You'd drive me out o' my senses if you all tried to come into the kitchen at once. See the size of it." She threw open the kitchen door. "Now I'll take one o' you at a time an' glad to; and I've no objection to beginnin' with the oldest. I'm free to confess I never did like to wash dishes alone."

"Then go away, girls," said Josephine. "It will be your turn to-morrow morning, Helen. You might go upstairs and take some of the things out of the trunks."

This suggestion was acted upon, and Dr. Lattimer read the evening paper brought up from the post-office by a neighbor, while Josephine explored the compact and convenient kitchen and listened to Miss Applebee's eulogiums of the wondrous little oil-stove which did her cooking.

The sisters always remembered the pleasant impressions of that first evening on the island when

with curtains drawn and fresh logs blazing they sat about the table and chatted until an early bedtime.

The rain pattered loudly yet soothingly on the roof sloping above their sleepy heads. A mysterious roar and rhythmical *whish* evidenced the near approach of mighty waters as yet unseen, which in the dark and helplessness of the night made Vernon cuddle a little closer to Helen with a sensation of being cut off from the world. Captain Amos' time-tested joke concerning the walking between the two islands recurred to her grimly, and she fell asleep and dreamed of plunging into the sea and swimming vainly to reach the mainland.

It was a 'novel sensation to waken the next day and see the high sloping roof overhead. The brilliant gilding on each crack in the tightly closed blinds told of a royal morning to Vernon, who sat up in bed cautiously and looked wistfully at the other sleepers in the spacious room. A hand waved to her from the cot bed opposite told that Josephine was awake, too, and Vernon lay down again patiently, having had instilled into her that priceless characteristic of unselfishness which refrains from insisting that all the household shall waken when one individual has had sufficient sleep. She listened to the sweep of the water, — the only sound which broke a stillness like that of the Garden of Eden, and recalling Mr. Randolph's photographs tried to picture what she should see when those tantalizing blinds were thrown open.

This desirable event took place, as she afterward found it did every morning, at a quarter of seven o'clock. With hasty greetings the girls crowded together before the open window, and before them stretched the blue, rolling expanse of the ocean all a-glitter with light. The cottage was set about fifteen feet away from the cliff, whose steep, grassy face was from top to bottom a garden of daisies. The tide was high and rising, and close to the snow of the blossoms broke the snow of the spreading foam as, with each incoming burst, the strong, compact rollers crept high and higher as though eager to reach if only to kiss the feet of the nodding, beckoning, smiling flowers, tossing their fair heads in the bright air.

After every mighty effort the water retreated, dragging its weight over boulders and pebbles with a hissing sound, as of the expiration of a labored breath, only to gather force for the next stealthy, powerful onslaught, while the daisies coquetted with each other and seemed to enjoy tantalizing their giant lover, who was after all destined never to embrace them.

A slight railing bordered the edge of the curving bluff, and the line of the occasional cottages followed this curve symmetrically as the girls had noticed in the photographs Mr. Randolph had shown them. But the contrast of the colorless, bleak effect of the picture with the glow and brilliancy of the reality impressed them all.

"Well, I declare for't, you've got the pick o'

days this time sure," observed Persis, who was standing behind the trio, well pleased with their pleasure. "This is one o' the mornin's when it seems as if you could pretty near jump over to Ragged Island. That's Ragged, the biggest one yonder. Can't you actually most count the twigs on the trees? And that island's miles away."

A song-sparrow lighted on the railing below them and poured out a rapturous little song.

"Amen!" said Josephine, when he had finished.

Persis laughed. "Well, this won't do for me. I must get downstairs or we won't have any breakfast."

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS NORMAN'S AFFLICTION.

MISS CHARLOTTE NORMAN came to her door that morning and out upon the piazza with as swelling a sense of pleasure in the sights and odors that greeted her as though she were enjoying it all for the first time.

Custom could never stale the infinite variety which lay about her beloved island. There was always a new combination of lights and shadows to remark, always a new ship whose rigging and business she wished to inquire into with her good spy-glass, and multifarious nearer interests connected with her cottage which caused the days to be as hours and the hours as minutes between June and September.

She looked off now through the indescribably clear air upon the wide familiar scene, from the picturesque slopes and cottages of Orr's on the left, along the line of islands here and there, until her eyes rested on the white sails of the open ocean at her right.

Agnes joined her. "This is Italy, Charlotte, not Maine," she said, linking her hand within her sister's arm, as she looked lovingly out upon

the bay. "This island was never named for a good New England deacon. It is *Isola Bella*."

"It deserves the title of Beautiful, if any place ever did," returned Miss Charlotte. "Did you ever see the grass so long? I declare I'm put out with Captain Liph. He has been promising to cut it for a week. You can't step off the piazza anywhere without going in nearly up to your knees, and it is as wet as a sponge. The *Nautilus* will be sailing off on it one of these nights."

"Doesn't it seem a pity to mow down the daisies?" said Agnes, looking at the long-stemmed flowers of unusual size and beauty which clung to the foundations of the house and lay like patches of snow in every field as far as the eye could reach. "They do seem more human than any other flower. One can't help feeling that they are having a good time laying their heads together so confidentially and nodding as though they were all of the same mind."

"I know it, but the grass must be cut. I'll just step over and see if Persis knows whether Captain Liph is coming to-day."

Miss Charlotte went into the house. The *Nautilus* and the *Sea Shell* were planned in the same simple fashion, excepting that the bay window Agnes had designed was now an accomplished fact. Miss Norman went to a corner closet similar to the one Persis had shown the girls and took therefrom her rubbers.

"I suppose Dickie is n't awake yet," she remarked as she drew them on.

"No, little lazy-bones."

"Oh, well, let him sleep. If we were in perpetual motion every minute of our waking hours I dare say we should sleep just so, and then he is growing, you know."

"He is welcome to sleep," returned Miss Agnes, "for the only time that I am sure he is safe down here is when he is in bed."

Her sister departed on her errand and Agnes went into the little kitchen to take up the breakfast. Some of the happiest moments of her life were spent in the novel domestic labors she performed in this same little kitchen. Dressed in her checked gingham gown, her head free from the complicated responsibilities of her professional life, her heart light as a child's in the seclusion of this island as yet undiscovered by the world, the clever fingers bungled delightedly in unaccustomed occupations, and that yearning for domesticity which is unquenchable in the breast of most professional women found satisfaction.

She had not quite completed her preparations when the slamming of the cottage door made her look into the front room.

Her sister had returned and was standing there with a portentous countenance.

"What is the matter, Charlotte?"

"The matter is that the island is spoiled. I've no interest in it any further, and my opinion is that we had better sell the cottage at once."

Miss Norman sat down and removed her dripping rubbers.

"I can't imagine what you mean."

"Dr. Latimer has brought all three of those Ivison girls down here."

Agnes, who had the coffee-pot in one hand and a plate of biscuit in the other, here set them down on the table.

"Now Charlotte," she said, seating herself near her sister and speaking in a business-like tone, "I should like to understand why you dislike those girls so much."

"I never said I did."

"But you have shown it every time they were mentioned. Surely you need not keep your reason a secret from me."

"You are logical, are n't you?" returned Miss Norman, including her sister in her offended manner. "I suppose you would like to see a procession of all your acquaintances whom you cannot reasonably dislike come down here and spend the summer."

Agnes smiled. "You are dodging cleverly, Charlotte. You always could. I think Olin must get the accomplishment from you; but I am after the plain truth now. Dr. Latimer likes those girls and wishes to serve them."

"And that is reason for you to do the same, I suppose," retorted Miss Charlotte sarcastically.

Agnes looked into her eyes steadily. "You know it is," she answered, "a sacred reason."

A slow blush crept over the face of the elder sister. Evidently reference had been made to some subject which was rarely touched.

"Agnes, dear, why can't you sympathize with me?" she asked more gently. "Don't you think at least Dr. Latimer should have asked our permission?"

"I remember your telling him once that we did not own the whole island."

"Yes, but there are so few in our little community. I think it is tacitly understood that no one is to be invited who would not be agreeable to all."

"Would you have given your consent had Dr. Latimer asked your permission?"

There were limits to Miss Norman's willingness to dodge. Her Puritan ancestry constrained her now.

"Probably not," she replied.

Agnes bowed. "And equally probably Dr. Latimer knew that," she suggested, "and therefore determined to bring about the greatest good to the greatest number. I confess I should suppose you would hail it as a bit of good fortune that Dickie's wonderful Miss Helen is domesticated next door and will continue her good influence upon him."

Miss Charlotte's disconsolate expression did not lighten, but she nodded. "It may be a very good thing for Dickie," she admitted.

"As for Miss Vernon," continued Agnes, "pro-

viding that the girl likes to go in bathing and is willing to be bothered with the child, it will be an immense relief to my mind to have one more young person about to look after him. Of course that is a selfish consideration, but then it is a consideration."

Miss Norman nodded again. "She does seem to understand children and like them," she replied, somewhat wrought upon by these suggestions.

"Then there remains only the eldest," said Agnes.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Miss Norman in unmitigated disapproval.

"Why, what is the matter with her?" asked the other with sincere curiosity.

"Just about everything," answered Charlotte.

"Well, I have met her a few times and failed to discover anything unattractive."

"Very well. She is vain and haughty and insolent," announced Miss Norman emphatically, "and if you have not observed it, all is you will live to. Her poverty would be nothing against her if she did not walk and carry her head as though she owned the city of Boston, and her good looks would be well enough if she were not so well aware of them. Her manner — well, you would naturally expect a girl in her position to behave humbly and deferentially; but there! if Dr. Latimer is going on to turn their heads the way he has been doing all the spring, how can you wonder?"

"He must see something in them," suggested Agnes.

"Pooh! The less he saw the more he would do for them."

"You don't really want to go away, Charlotte?"

"Go away?" Miss Norman turned upon the speaker as though she had suggested a totally novel and outrageous thought. "Do you suppose I would allow Josephine Ivison to think she could drive me away from the island?"

Agnes wiped her mouth with her pocket-handkerchief.

"Well, do treat them well," she said. "You will be sure to regret it afterward if you don't."

"My dear, be good enough to remember that I knew manners when you were a baby. There is Dickie," as a sleepy shout came down the stair.

"Make him dress himself," advised Agnes. "The coffee is growing cold."

"No; don't want to," shouted Dickie in response to this suggestion.

"He can't very well," said Miss Charlotte in a low, deprecating tone, starting for the stairs.

"Just wait a minute," returned her sister, laying a detaining hand on her arm. "Dickie," loudly, "if you will be a good boy and dress yourself quickly I will take you to see Miss Helen and Miss Vernon."

"Truly?" in excited incredulity.

"Yes; they have come to visit Dr. Latimer."

A shrill yell of delight and a scrambling about overhead told that Miss Agnes had reckoned correctly, and her sister, with a sigh of resignation, followed her example in sitting down at table.

"What did you learn about the grass?" asked Agnes.

"I forgot all about it. I opened Dr. Latimer's door and there stood those girls, and I was so startled that all thought of my errand left me. I managed to say something, I don't know what, and got home as quickly as I could."

"Did n't you shake hands with them?"

"Oh, yes; I shook hands with them, — or they with me."

In a surprisingly short time Dickie came clattering down the uncarpeted stairs and rushed blindly for the door.

"Come here, come here," called Miss Charlotte.

"But I want to see" —

"Yes, I know; but you must eat your breakfast first and give them time to eat theirs. Come right here."

The small boy submitted reluctantly to his fate, stretching his neck between every two spoonfuls of oatmeal to gaze out of the window which commanded a view of the Sea Shell.

At last he saw the cottage door open and Dr. Latimer, Josephine, and Vernon come out upon the piazza.

"There's Miss Vernon. Hi!" shouted Dickie, waving his spoon eagerly. "Please let me go,

auntie," and slipping down from his chair the child made another excited rush for the door.

"I will go with him and speak to them," said Agnes, rising from the table; "but as I am not amphibious like Dickie, I shall have to slip on my overshoes."

Suiting the action to the word, the speaker, lifting her skirt clear of the long grass, crossed the space between the cottages.

Josephine came to the edge of the Sea Shell piazza and smiled her a greeting.

"You look as though you were coming through a Christmas card, among that profusion of daisies so much larger than life," she said.

Miss Norman smiled as she welcomed the sisters. Dickie, after noisily greeting Vernon, had rushed into the house in pursuit of Helen.

"What a surprise you have given us, Doctor," said Agnes, her gracious manner implying that the surprise was a pleasant one. "Did you order this morning especially for your guests?"

"It came according to the law of compensation, I suspect. They arrived in the fog yesterday."

"Are n't we fortunate to be here?" asked Josephine. "Dr. Latimer has just been telling us the names of the islands in sight. What an enchanting little bay is made by the curve of the land right here!"

"Yes," murmured Agnes, with a lingering look out upon the water, —

“ ‘And where the islands stand apart,
The ocean's waves roll in to pay
Some tribute from the sea's great heart
To gentle, queenly Casco Bay;
To Casco Bay! Dear Casco Bay!
Your soul imbibes the salt-sea spray,
And sings with lovely Casco Bay.’

“You will be sure to join us who sing with Casco Bay. Do you swim, Miss Josephine?”

“I suppose I could not now. I did swim when I was a child.”

“It will come back to you,” said Miss Norman. “We go into the water very often, but my sister and I have never learned yet to venture beyond our depth.”

“The water looks as though it might be cold.”

“Oh, we don't go in here. We can offer you something much more inviting. If you arrived in a fog I suppose you have yet to discover the cove.”

“Yes,” returned Dr. Latimer. “They have everything to discover. We are only waiting for Miss Helen to be ready to join us in an introductory ramble, after which these guests will be given the freedom of the island, and go and come as they like.”

Helen being soon dismissed by Persis with kind peremptoriness, the little cavalcade set forth attended by Dickie, who skipped along by his teacher like a happy little shadow.

Agnes entered the cottage. “Well, Persis,” she said, standing in the doorway of the kitchen, “how do you like this increase of family?”

"I like it first-rate, or I guess I should n't a-had it," returned Miss Applebee, wringing out the dish-cloth she had just been washing. "The doctor left it to me to decide, but I never had two minds about it from the minute he suggested havin' 'em come. Says I to myself, them orphans are goin' to have a lonely time of it an' a hot time of it in Boston, situated as they be. I knew they was nice girls and 't wan't likely they'd be any trouble, and I can see they won't be. They take hold like girls that's been brought up to have sense instead o' nonsense, and they're so tickled it does a body good to see 'em. There they go now." Persis gazed through the window at the little group following the path through a field strewn with clover blossoms of a size and royal depth of color unknown inland. Profuse buttercups with no alloy in their gold reflected the sun from their polished petals, as they rose high amid the daisied grass.

Beyond lay the cove, dimpling and sparkling in the arms of the island, its steep sheltered shore picturesque with trees, excepting at its extreme end, where the gracious curve of its white beach invited the bather.

Miss Norman and Persis from their window could see the girls stop when the view first dawned upon them. Beyond the outside arm of the island lay a larger cove, and bordering that, Harpswell Neck, with its shining cottages. To-day in the clearness the view only stopped with the White

Mountains, whose majestic outlines were defined against the sky eighty miles away.

"I know it pleases Dr. Latimer to have such a morning for his guests," observed Miss Norman. "Persis, what are we going to do about the grass? We shall have to send you after Captain Liph if he does n't appear this morning."

"I don't know, I'm sure. There goes Cap'n Amos, now."

"Oh, I want him," exclaimed Agnes, hurrying to the kitchen door to intercept the captain as he came leisurely down the lane.

"Good-morning, Cap'n Amos. Have you time to do a little job for me? I can't get hold of Saunders."

"Good-mornin', Aunt Agnes. Guess Saunders is pretty busy on the new cawtage, ain't he?" The speaker smiled benignly.

"Yes, and I want a shelf fastened up."

"All right. Guess I can do it now," replied the obliging Jack-of-all-trades.

Persis came out upon the back piazza. "Good-mornin', Cap'n Amos. Got that cod for me this mornin'?"

"No, I have n't. Got lawbsters, though, 'f ye want 'em."

Persis nodded with that facile resignation to a change of menu which a housekeeper at the island soon learns. "Yes, I want 'em," she returned promptly.

"All right. You'll find 'em there," remarked

the captain affably. "We took a sturgeon in the pound eight foot long this mornin'. It must a-weighed three hundred."

"What did you do with him?"

"Killed him. Had to, to git him out."

"But you saved him?"

"No; 't wan't any use."

"Why, Cap'n Amos!" exclaimed Persis regretfully. "I wish you had cut off a few steaks for me."

"Well, I will next time, 'f ye like that kind. Jest as soon eat a skunk myself," and the captain moved off, following Miss Norman.

"We 're waiting for Cap'n Liph to cut this grass," she said, picking her way through its wet luxuriance. "He has been promising us ever so long."

"Guess he 'll be 'round to-day, very likely," returned the other optimistically. "Good-mornin', Aunt Charlotte," he added as Miss Norman met them at the door.

"He says he thinks Cap'n Liph is coming to-day," explained Agnes, "and he is going to put up the shelf for us."

"Here it is," returned Miss Charlotte. "How are all at home, Cap'n Amos?" she added, with a sincere kindness in tone and look which would have shown her face in a novel light to the Iverson girls, could they have seen it.

"The'r all tol'ably, thank ye, 'xcept Annie. She ain't very hearty jest now."

"That is what I noticed. We want the shelf in this corner, Cap'n Amos. Did she have a hard winter?"

"We-ell, the weather was extra bad this year and she was shut up a grea' deal. The hills was one glare o' ice and the wind was sharper 'n common. Annie's cough was bad, an' she did n't ventur' out o' the house once, only the few days when 't was mawdrate an' hahnsome."

"Ah, that was hard for her, I know," replied Miss Norman to the accompaniment of the hammer blows. "We want this little image fastened to the shelf," she continued, producing the statuette of a child at present sitting upon empty air and industriously singing out of a music-book resting upon his chubby bare knees.

Captain Amos turned his head from his work.

"Hold the little bugger up here so's I can see it," he said. "Oh, yes. Aunt Martha tried one time to bring a thing like that down from Portland in her trunk, but when she got here 't was stove all to thunder. There ain't much substance to 'em."

Agnes sat watching the proceedings. "You and Cap'n Liph are n't at all alike, Cap'n Amos," she remarked, after a pause, during which the amateur carpenter had been carefully adjusting the statuette.

"That ain't so strange," replied the captain, taking a nail from between his teeth. "My father was married twice an' had two craps o' children. I b'long to the second. How's that, Aunt Char-

lotte?" he continued, dropping his head back to survey the singing child that was now safely spiked to its place.

"Thank you; that is very nice. Now, if you see your brother this morning, do remind him, won't you?"

CHAPTER XIV.

GINGER ALE AND PEPPERMINTS.

CAPTAIN LIPH with his oxen and mowing machine did move leisurely across the field that day and relieve the minds of the dwellers in Maiden Lane. Before night a thousand blossoms lay dying, and the next day the expiring sweetness of the clover filled all the air.

Josephine rejoiced later in the sight of the old-fashioned hay-wagon and the picturesque form of Captain Liph walking beside the oxen, as he guided them with the touch of his goad and many a musical-toned "gee" and "haw."

She sat on the side step of the Sea Shell piazza, her sketch-block in her lap, and the old man saw her and smiled as he approached.

"Wall, how are ye likin'?" he asked.

"Very much, indeed. I imagine you know that every one must be happy here," replied the girl.

"Pretty sightly place in summer," admitted Captain Liph.

"I was just thinking that the ocean looks as though I could dip a brush in it and paint the fence and houses blue if I liked. I think all the indigo in Portland must have fallen into the water this morning."

"Th' ocean can look a number o' differ'nt ways," remarked the old man, "and if you lived here the year 'round you'd be apt to put your house as far away from it as you could git. I've seen these cawtages in winter stickin' up here like spikes, stiff with ice."

"It is astonishing what a difference there is in climate on the two sides of the island," answered Josephine.

"Yes, and it's cold enough anywheres, come winter, specially for folks with the rheumatiz."

"Do you suffer with rheumatism?" asked Josephine, much entertained by Captain Liph's reposeful speech as he stood against the background made by the oxen and wagon.

"I do so," affirmed the low voice emphatically. "I declare for 't, I did think last winter my hip would — be — hove — out!"

"Oh! Too bad."

"Well, that was a spell o' weather," continued Captain Liph reminiscently. "'T was cold enough to shave ye, an' the wind blew like the day o' jedgment. I s'pose now you would n't b'lieve that the bo'ts pulled the island round, they tugged so hard at the'r moorin's?"

"That is very wonderful," laughed Josephine in response to a twinkle in the captain's eyes.

"Well, Spot, we must go on."

"You don't know what a picture you make with your oxen," said Josephine, as he turned.

"I guess the'r ain't much danger of our makin'

a very pretty *pictur'*," answered the old man, smiling, as the heavy animals moved slowly on their way.

The younger Miss Norman came out of her cottage, and crossing the grass to Josephine sat down beside her.

"Do you think you 'll get the hay all in to-day, Captain Liph?" she asked as she passed him.

"Dunno yet," he answered, as he sauntered on. "I've got to go up-along this ahfternoon. Wher's Olin? Ain't he comin' down this summer?"

"I think not."

"What did he say he had to do this afternoon?" asked Josephine, who looked wistfully after the white-haired giant, sorry to lose the sound of his voice.

"He has to go 'up-along.' That means toward the northern end of the island. The southern end is 'down-along.' There are two families of Martins here, and to distinguish them one is always referred to as the up-along Martins and the other as the down-along Martins."

Josephine smiled reflectively. "How delicious it all is," she said at last, vaguely, not specifying whether she referred to Captain Liph and his picturesque team, or the all-pervading fragrance of new-mown hay, or the foam-edged tide retreating now in its daily discouragement from the effort to reach the daisies that bloomed in gay carelessness of the fate of their withered sisters on the table-land above.

"Have you been to the Giant's Staircase?" asked Miss Norman.

"No. Dr. Latimer is to tell us when to go. It seems there is a great choice of times and seasons."

"That is true. The wind has hardly blown since you arrived. This light breeze is unusual. For the most part life on the island always seems to me like life on the deck of an extraordinarily well-behaved steamer; the wind blows so steadily from uncontaminated space and the water surges so heavily about our little hill. One has the absolute rest of a sea voyage here."

"There is very little of the usual salt odor to the air. I have noticed that ever since I came."

"Yes; I think it is owing to the comparative absence of seaweed. The water is very deep all about us, and absolutely clear, you see. I suppose if the ocean were to roll back we should find ourselves upon a mountain. There is none of the usual dampness of the seashore. My sister and I leave needles and scissors down here all winter and find them free from rust when we want them again."

"Why is not the place overrun with people?"

"Don't suggest it!" exclaimed Miss Norman in unaffected horror. "There is nothing to do here but vegetate, and happily most people want something beside. Witness Mr. Randolph."

"How did you and Miss Charlotte happen to discover the island?"

We came to Orr's a couple of summers, and one day, being curious to explore this island, we packed a basket of lunch and hired a man to set us over. I needed to get away from people. I was not so strong then as I am now, and when we set foot on this shore, saw the cove, and walked over to this cliff, we gloried in the wildness and beauty, and, remembering the bridge which invites humanity to invade Orr's Island, looked at one another with the same thought. No steamer touched here in those days and the following summer we sailed down from Portland with Captain Amos and set up housekeeping in the Nautilus. Here it stood alone for a year or two, the dear little home, facing the ocean all winter on this bleak height; but little by little one and another friend has followed our example, until we have neighbors, as you see. I am sure it seemed a strange freak to the islanders that any one should choose this exposed situation rather than the inner, sheltered portions of land, and we bought one hundred and fifty feet here of Captain Amos for seventy-five dollars. His wife, dear soul, said that coming into such an amount of money would not make any difference to her. She should work just the same. Now, naturally, a higher value is set upon the ground as the owners discover that it is desirable; but nowhere have I found kinder friends, greater integrity or truer dignity than among the upright Christian people on this island."

"I cannot tell you," said Josephine, "how

strange it sounds to me to hear them call you 'Aunt Agnes.' "

"It is what they have always heard Olin call me, and afterward Dickie. It is their way of expressing good feeling. In return Mrs. Amos is 'Aunt Martha' to us. You must see her. She has looked exactly the same ever since we first knew her; and as she eats cloves all the time, I have the feeling that she is preserved like an apple. Where are your sisters this morning?"

"They have gone to some rock pools where Dickie has promised they shall find sea-creatures. I think I see them coming across the field now. Yes, there they are. Let us meet them."

Accordingly Agnes and Josephine strolled along the bluff and met the jolly trio with their tin pails, accompanied by Puggy, who wore an uncommonly careworn expression on his wrinkled brow, as though the fatigues of the morning had been heavy.

Agnes smiled as she recalled Captain Amos' deliberate comment when he was first confronted with this novel specimen of dog-kind:—

"That there critter's had his nose stove in."

She patted the panting little animal.

"Such funny things as we have!" exclaimed Vernon eagerly. "I can't wait to have you see them, Josephine. Why, Dickie knows just where to find everything. You must come with us the next time."

Dickie led the way to the Nautilus and bounced

into the house, from whence he brought a large soup tureen. In this receptacle they carefully placed the stones, weeds, water, and finally the snails, anemones, barnacles, starfish, and sea-urchins they had captured. Miss Charlotte came out and looked dubiously at the group sitting about in attitudes of *abandon* on her piazza.

"Just see what a lot we brought, Miss Norman!" cried Vernon, her white Tam O'Shanter on the back of her head and her face flushed with heat. "Dickie is just splendid at finding them."

"So he is," returned Miss Norman, condescending to stoop over the tureen and investigate.

"What are those green things?" asked Josephine.

"Sea-urchins," replied Helen, lifting one out. "Here, take it and see what a strange thing it is."

She laid the prickly object in Josephine's palm, and the latter regarded it curiously for a second; then, as the animal laid its spines down she uttered a cry and bestowed the urchin with informal haste upon the piazza.

"Oh, it wriggled and shut up!" she exclaimed.

"Well that is more than some people know enough to do," laughed Agnes lazily. "Did n't you suppose it was alive?"

"Not that unpleasant way. I thought it was a nice, quiet burr."

"Let's race a couple of them," suggested Dickie, and, suiting the action to the word, he placed two urchins on the piazza, where they worked their

laborious way across the boards, leaving a wet trail behind them ; but their pace could not be considered exciting, and Dickie, perceiving Captain Liph and the hay-wagon in the distance, gave a whoop of joyful discovery and bounded away, followed by Puggy.

Vernon held out a starfish to Josephine, who, observing the stirring and groping of its pink arms, declined to receive it.

"I like to look at them," she said apologetically, "but I can't bear to feel them wiggle."

"What in the world can be more interesting," observed Miss Charlotte, forgetting her antipathies for the moment, in her always lively interest in these little wonders of the sea. "There, Miss Helen, the anemones are beginning to blossom."

The girls eagerly put their heads together to see the unfolding fringes.

"And see those snails, how fast they pull themselves along — for snails," said Vernon. "See them wave their funny horns."

"Watch the barnacles now," added Miss Charlotte, tilting the tureen and setting the water in motion, whereat one of the barnacles opened his little door and, thrusting out a tiny black hand with fine thread-like fingers, began in a business-like fashion to gather something from the water.

"The cunning thing!" exclaimed Josephine.

"It thinks the tide is coming in," said Miss Charlotte, and she met Josephine's eyes as they were lifted eagerly to hers, with a smile which

Miss Ivison in Boston would have waited long to receive. The air is so pure on the island that it disinfects even the human heart, and one of the barnacles, common and numerous as the sands of the sea and small as the tip of Miss Norman's finger, had come from the ocean that morning to do its little part in the service of the Maker.

"You have made a study of these creatures, have n't you, Miss Norman?" asked Josephine.

"Well, yes, in a small way, for Dickie's sake."

"He quoted you so often while we were at the pools," remarked Helen, "that I saw you had been his incentive."

Agnes, who had disappeared, here came to the door and invited the group into the house, where they were soon sitting about the cool parlor, each provided with a glass of ginger ale.

"Ginger ale is our beverage here," explained Agnes, "and you cannot be said to have been initiated into the Maiden Lane community until you have drunk a few bottles, and eaten a pound or so of peppermints." She indicated a white and gold dish on the table which was filled with the confection. "The ale we send to Portland for, but the peppermints are indigenous to the soil."

Miss Charlotte sipped from her glass and looked about on the assembled company with feelings of bewilderment. She was too hospitable by habit not to be aware of some satisfaction in the pleasure expressed by the young people in the pretty arrangements of her house, which was more dainty

in its decoration than Dr. Latimer's. She had not failed to notice the abrupt change for the better in Dickie since coming again under Helen's influence; so the only remaining grievance which she could rationally call one was the circumstance of Josephine's presence, and her bewilderment arose from the fact that this grievance was becoming shadowy. The young woman's beauty was so happy in these surroundings it seemed rather enjoyable than otherwise, and the unconscious stateliness of her bearing roused less antagonism since she showed a proper gratitude and appreciation of her good fortune in being here at all; an attitude of rejoicing wonder being the only one Miss Norman could tolerate in a neophyte in the island life.

Dr. Latimer came in at the open door and viewed the group with a look of satisfaction.

"I suppose it is of no use to offer you this, doctor," Agnes indicated one of the bottles. "Dr. Latimer is in reality an alien, for he has never been brought to enjoy the regulation island refreshments."

That afternoon the whole party, as was usual on quiet days, went in bathing in the cove; and when they came out, the steamer's whistle having sounded, Vernon volunteered to go for the mail. She climbed the green hill to the road, when, glancing back to see what passengers the boat had brought, a familiar figure approaching gave her a start of pleasant surprise. In these last happy days she had not had time to think of Mr. Ran-

dolph, and now she told herself exultingly that as a watched pot never boils, forgetting him had had the good effect to bring him.

She stood still and waited while he drew near and lifted his hat.

"Sensible man," she said demurely.

"Thank you. Well, how are ye likin'?"

"I'm loving," she replied.

"Are you?" Olin inspected the bright countenance as they moved along the road. "You're beginning to color, I see."

"Yes, look at my hands," Vernon spread them out. "Well, you did n't exaggerate the charms of this place in the least, except the 'Fountain House.'" The girl looked over her shoulder toward the little two-story wooden building, which with its bare floors entertained simply the rare guest who wished to spend the night at the island; "but I like it a thousand times better the way it is," she added.

"How are your sisters?"

"Well and happy as they can be. We have all just come out of the water, and I hurried ahead, because I wanted to be the first to catch the mail."

"Thank you."

"What? Oh! After that I can't stay with you another minute. *Au revoir*," and Vernon sped on her way down the hill, rough with rocks, to where near the water's edge stood the little store which combined the post-office with its miscellaneous merchandise.

When the others returned more leisurely from the bath, the Misses Norman entered their cottage from the back piazza.

"Why, the front door is open," said Miss Charlotte. "Did I forget it?"

"Probably you did," returned her sister; when suddenly a flute-like whistle sounded the theme of the love-song from the "Walküre."

"Olin has come!" exclaimed Agnes, flinging open the screen door and stepping out upon the piazza where her nephew was lying in a hammock and looking very long and very comfortable. He regarded her astonished countenance with the slightest smile, but did not disturb himself.

"Well!" she exclaimed, biting her lip. "By whose invitation are you here?"

"Don't dissemble your joy at seeing me, Aunt Agnes. Come and kiss me."

"You have made a little mistake, I think," she continued. "You surely intended to go on to Bar Harbor. What you want is there. Your place is with the 'harriers of scenery,' and people that hop. You are not worthy to behold this lonely sublimity."

"You have n't kissed me yet," observed Olin.

"I expressly told you you could n't come," continued Agnes implacably.

"Olin, my dear, dear boy!" exclaimed Miss Charlotte, appearing and charging upon her nephew with a cordial caress. "I waited to light my wicks, for when Agnes said you were here I knew

you would like some hot cornbread for supper. I'm so glad you decided to come. I must go in and set the table. Agnes, tell him whom we have next door. He will be so surprised."

"Yes, he will be so surprised," repeated Agnes with scorn.

Randolph stepped out of the hammock and his aunt took a step backward. "Now, don't you touch me!" she exclaimed.

For answer Olin strode forward and gathering her in his arms lifted her lightly and deposited her on the couch he had just vacated. Then he held the netting across her with one hand and calmly looked down upon his prisoner.

"How did you find out they were here?" asked Miss Norman, unsubdued even by her lowly position.

"Who?"

"Those girls you have come down to see."

Her jailer began to swing the hammock gently.

"Now, Olin Randolph, stop that at once," she exclaimed perturbedly. "You know I cannot bear to swing."

"Are you glad to see me?"

"You wretch!" hysterically.

"Did I understand you to say that you had been watching every boat for me?"

"Oh, Olin, please! Yes, anything!"

Randolph steadied the hammock, and, stooping, kissed his aunt's laughing, vexed face.

"Thank you," he said calmly. "It is sweet to be loved."

CHAPTER XV.

AGNES NORMAN'S DISCOVERY.

THE wind Dr. Latimer had been waiting for sprang up that afternoon, and the following morning a line of foam, stealing from the point of land which jutted out to sea south of the cottages across the blue waves northward, told the story of the agitation along the rugged shore.

At the proper hour, when the tide was nearly at its height, the party was to set forth.

Persis took from the curtained corner of the parlor three tall staves and gave each of the girls one.

"What is this for?" asked Josephine.

"It's a third leg," returned Miss Applebee sententiously, "and you'll be glad enough of it. Have you all got on your rubber-soled shoes? That's right. Now tie your hats down good and tight and good luck to you."

"Are n't you coming, Persis?"

"Can't. Got to forage for our dinner or we won't get any."

"What a lot of trouble you have," said Helen contritely.

"Oh, it's kind of excitin' to keep house at the

island," answered Persis good-humoredly. "You can never tell what you'll get, or whether you'll get anythin', and havin' to hunt down your vittles and go after 'em takes time, but it's all right. I like it. Go along, now. Dr. Latimer's waitin' for you."

Dickie danced across the grass impatiently, and was relieved to see the girls come out. The other members of the Nautilus family joined them as they passed the house, the ladies carrying staves similar to those Persis had produced, and wearing hats tied down with wind-defying veils.

"Don't we look like pilgrims?" asked Helen of Olin.

"Yes, and I hope you feel due reverence for your shrine. I understand this is to be your first view of the stairs."

"It is, and we are eager for it; but how funny we all look." Helen glanced involuntarily at Miss Charlotte, who was wearing an ulster which had endured the wind and weather of many island summers.

"It is a part of the creed of Maiden Lane to look as appalling as possible," said Randolph.

The girls watched the Misses Norman's use of the stout sticks in passing through the ups and downs of the boulder-strewn fields, but Vernon scorned hers as she skipped along, closely shadowed by Dickie.

The roaring of the water, as the steepness and height of the rocky shore increased, grew ever

louder until by and by the company stood at the point which had been named the Giant's Staircase. Between two precipitous walls of rock huge boulders were placed, stair-like, and up these mammoth steps at high tide the water plunged with a wild roar. Meeting the resistance of the gray walls, it rebounded with a shock which flung the foam high in the air, while at the retreating of the wave a thousand cascades and miniature bridal veils flowed back from the interstices of the granite. A seething, hissing mass of water boiled ceaselessly in the cauldrons formed by submerged rocks along the shore, and on its snowy bosom lay flecks and balls of yellow foam churned to a lasting consistency by the powerful tide.

It was such a revelation of force as one may see at many points along New England shores, but fortunately for the Ivisons' standing with Miss Norman, it was a complete novelty to them, and their appreciation of the grandeur of the scene satisfied her.

"I should not want to come here if I were in any trouble," said Helen to Dr. Latimer, who had given her his hand across the rocky steepes and chasms until they sat together on the edge of the high cliff. "There is something terrible in such unrest."

"Yes, I understand."

The thundering of the incoming breakers made speech inaudible to any but one's very near neighbor, and Josephine, from where she sat with the

others of the party, looked over to where Dr. Latimer was watching her sister's face and wondered what they were saying. The combination of the blinding sunlight, relentless rush of the wind, and wild uproar of water was almost painful to her now; but were she in Helen's place all would be magically changed.

Mr. Randolph was her next neighbor. "Here is a fine one now," he remarked, as a roller of unusual size, clear and compact as green glass, rushed powerfully landward.

"Superb!" exclaimed Josephine, holding her breath at the splitting shock with which the water was driven high in air, the myriad flecks of foam falling back with graceful deliberation.

"We felt that," said Olin, as the girl wiped the invisible spray from her face.

Dickie, who had been darting about familiarly and fearlessly on the slippery rocks, disappeared for a time, and here approached, running, with something clasped carefully in one hand.

"The strawberries are ripe, Cousin Olin," he exclaimed delightedly. "I found these right over there in the pasture."

He opened his little palm, disclosing a dozen or more of the delicate berries jammed in their difficult pilgrimage until, to any eyes but the small boy's, they presented a decidedly martyred appearance.

Randolph regarded them dubiously. "'M,— nice," he returned; then seeing the radiant little face, "They're very nice, Dickie," he added.

"I picked them for you," said the child.

Josephine thought she heard a low groan through the thunder of the elements. "Oh — a — thank you. Don't you want them? Do eat them yourself; I'd rather you would," declared Olin with pathetic sincerity.

"Oh, no. They're for you," repeated the boy, regarding the red mass with an admiration which emphasized his generosity. "I can get some more."

"Well, thank you, then."

Randolph held out his hand to receive the treasure, looking at Josephine, who received his glance appreciatively. "I have n't a doubt as to the purity of his intentions," he murmured, while Dickie delayed his departure until he had enjoyed his beneficiary's first taste of the fruit.

"Why, he is nice," thought Josephine, as Olin waited for his cousin to be safely out of sight before he added another tint to the bottle-green waves and white foam, and wiped his hands on his handkerchief.

Indeed, Josephine's grievances, one and another, seemed all to have been left behind, perhaps accidentally, in Boston. All that had offended her in these acquaintances seemed a hazy, unimportant memory now. There was nothing here but happiness. To be sure her craving to be within sight of Dr. Latimer's face and within sound of his voice was frequently unsatisfied, as, once assured that his guests found their surroundings congenial, he

left them very much to their own devices, absenting himself from the house many hours of each day. This, however, was only a variation in degree of contentment. The island was but two miles long and one wide; she knew he was either somewhere within its limits or out in his boat and soon to return, and she disciplined herself to emulate his own unselfishness. Why should she expect a lion's share of his companionship? Had he not come here to be alone? and she said to her sisters that Dr. Latimer had shown a certain confidence in their judgment and good taste, by the very fact of permitting them to share his roof in these weeks of relaxation, and that they must not abuse it.

"He keeps watch of us all the time," returned Helen smiling. "He knows pretty definitely how our day is to be spent before he takes himself off."

"Do you think we worry him?" asked Josephine.

"No. I believe he likes to have us here."

"I know he does," added Vernon complacently. "I think Dr. Latimer is really fond of me."

"You always were a modest violet, Vernon," laughed Helen, but Josephine gazed at the youngest wistfully.

"He does like you," she said. "I think you amuse him and do him good."

But the passage of days developed a fact which Josephine had already suspected.

It became evident that the younger Miss Norman was the doctor's most valued friend.

The girl's alert eyes and ears were daily discovering proofs of the deep and solid understanding which subsisted between these two. Their relation to one another puzzled her. She saw that Miss Agnes' watchfulness of the doctor was as keen as her own, and her quickness was unfailing to further any desire or plan of his. Frequently after tea, when the little community on the cliff were strolling about in social fashion by the evening sea, and dancing or playing games upon the grass, these two would stroll away, drawing Josephine's heart after them as they disappeared in the distance.

She was humiliated by the unrest and lack of interest in her surroundings which suddenly possessed her at such times, and forced herself to be bright and responsive in such an unusual degree that Mr. Randolph made gratifying progress in his efforts toward a friendly relation with her; while Vernon, whom no word or action of Olin's escaped, decided indignantly that her sister was becoming a flirt, and gave herself up to an *abandon* of gayety with Dickie, thereby lifting that young person to the seventh heaven of delight. Thus even the handful of persons on this peaceful island contributed their share to the great play of life, and concealed, and acted, and accidentally gave pleasure and pain, one profiting by another's loss, as people are doing all the time the world over; offering another proof that wherever there are human hearts there are tragedy and comedy, and the

play must go on even amid surroundings which seem silently to rebuke all selfish longings and limitations.

Little by little there grew up in Josephine's mind a wariness toward Agnes Norman. The latter held the place of all in the world which the girl most coveted,—the place of Dr. Latimer's trusted friend,—and Josephine was so ashamed of her consequent jealousy that she wished not to be much with Miss Norman lest some sign of it should escape her; but this avoidance became less easy since Agnes' liking for herself was evidently growing every day.

"I have never known Dr. Latimer to show such marked personal preference for any acquaintances as he has for you and your sisters," Miss Norman said to her once.

"You mean excepting for yourself." Josephine had not realized how blunt, how rude the reply would sound; but it forced itself from her heart, and she colored with vain longing to recall it.

"Oh, for myself," returned Agnes, and the girl could not fail to perceive that in her far-away gaze there was no trace of offense, "I belong to Dr. Latimer,—to his service. Whatever I am or have or can do for him is his. But excuse me," coming back to her surroundings, "you cannot understand me."

In that first instant as she glanced back at Josephine she caught an expression of pain in eyes and lips that startled her. It was gone in an in-

stant, but it had been so intense and surprising that Miss Norman felt confused.

They stood in silence for half a minute, there by the railing on the cliff's edge. Josephine, angry with herself for her resentment, and not knowing how to respond to Miss Norman's frankness, while the latter's heart filled with pity for her companion, whatever might be the key to that look she had surprised in her eyes.

It was an amazing thought to her that Josephine might be jealous of herself, — so astonishing that it turned her grave to consider in a flash many ramifications of the idea.

She had never given the girl so kind and earnest a gaze as she bent upon her now.

"Let us sit down here a minute," she said, flinging open a gate in the slight fence and indicating a flat rock which made an inviting seat.

They suited the action to the word, and the daisies, few and rare now, waved at their feet.

"You know enough about me, probably," continued Miss Norman, "to call me a successful woman."

Josephine assented, mystified by this beginning.

"I do not know," went on her companion, "that any woman can be called wholly successful who has failed to become a wife and mother. I believe that in an ideal state of the world every woman would be a wife and a mother; but I am successful in my profession, it is useful to myself and others, and I am happy in it."

"You must be, very," replied Josephine.

"I said too much to you a moment ago regarding Dr. Latimer, not to say more" —

"Don't think you must!" exclaimed the other impetuously. "Please don't!"

"Listen. All that I am I owe to him. When I was a child my parents were in very modest circumstances, but seeing my natural talent for music they contrived to have me well taught, and when I was eighteen years of age I was considered one of the best amateur pianists in Boston. About that time there happened to me what comes to overpower the talent of many a gifted girl. I fell in love. An engagement followed, and although at this distance it all seems as though it had happened to some one else, I do not like even now to dwell upon that period. I wonder if all engaged girls are as happy as I was. I hope so. The man I was to marry lived in New York, and he spent a few days of each month with me during the year of our engagement. All that time I saw a great deal of Dr. Latimer, who was the intimate friend of one of my brothers, and took great interest in my affairs, losing no opportunity of civility to the man I loved. At last the wedding time drew near. My family united in helping on the preparations, as is the way at a time which draws forth all the affection in the hearts of a girl's friends. All was ready. The invitations were out. The wedding-dress, I remember it so well, lay on a bed in all its misty daintiness — well, details do not matter."

Miss Norman's voice, which had been agitated, grew firm as she clasped the hand Josephine had stolen into hers. "The evening before the wedding, the lover of that poor girl, whose anguish I can scarcely recognize now as my own, eloped with another woman."

Josephine drew a sharp breath.

"For a few weeks I did not see Dr. Latimer. He was ill himself at the time, but when at last he came to me it was the beginning of my new life!" Miss Norman's lips trembled and she was forced to pause a moment. "All he did for me I cannot fully explain without revealing that which I have not the right to disclose. Up to that time I had known him as a happy, careless young fellow, with plenty of money and the desire to let others enjoy it, but now he developed a grave purpose which surprised us all."

"He had loved her all the time," thought Josephine acutely, and the sudden pressure she gave Miss Norman's hand was involuntary.

"I had fallen into a morbid condition from which none of my own family were able to rouse me. The physician shook his head and hinted at melancholia, but finally Dr. Latimer arose from his own sick-bed and came to me. He was in trouble of his own at the time, which made his endeavor to uplift and strengthen another so touching that even I, sunk in unnoticed despondency, was moved by it. In the conclave of my family he planned a new life for me. I was to go abroad

with my sister Charlotte for a companion, there to cultivate my musical gift. How Dr. Latimer found means to persuade me — how he supplied not only the money for the undertaking, but resuscitated my dead ambition and put strength into my weak will — is a long story. A still longer one would be to follow the faithful friend as he held me to my uncertain purpose through that first year, never allowing me to stand alone until he saw that it was safe. I have repaid him his money; but do you think the debt is discharged?"

"No, no, Miss Norman."

"Charlotte and I are nearly alone in the world now. Of those who knew what Dr. Latimer did for me so silently not one remains. Not Olin himself knows as much as I have told you; and I have told you, because," Miss Agnes paused a long moment, then added, "because I wanted you to know, Josephine."

The girl slid an arm around the older woman while her excited thoughts were in a tumult. All that Agnes had told her seemed to point to such devotion as it seemed to her nothing short of miraculous to resist in the case of Dr. Latimer.

"It is nearly twenty years now since all this took place," said Miss Norman musingly.

Twenty years. The wonder grew to Josephine.

"A short lifetime, you see."

"And you and Dr. Latimer go your different ways with this strong bond between you," said the

girl, something of her perplexity showing in her voice.

"Yes," answered Agnes half sadly. "I sometimes wish his path were as easy as mine."

"You mean that the sort of work he does is too hard, too dangerous," said Josephine. "Your sister has told me more about it than I ever knew."

"Yes, yes," replied the other, sighing.

"Why don't you — you who have so much influence with him — hold him back?"

"Who am I that I should hold him back?" returned the other quietly. "Beside, you are mistaken," she added with deliberate purpose. "I have not more influence with him than others have. You have observed that he likes to be with me, but it is because our memories are the same and I know all his life, through and through. There is a certain restfulness in such companionship, you understand, and through the long working season we seldom meet."

Josephine colored violently as though she had been caught in the act of coveting another's possessions. She felt so young, so left out, so passionately envious of this favored woman, heart-sorrow and all.

"Oh, dear," thought Miss Norman, perceiving the blush, "this is bad business." She had become interested in Josephine, so much so as to be seriously disturbed by the anticipation of unhappiness for her.

She welcomed the sight of Olin, who appeared from the Nautilus door and approached.

"I want to thank you, Miss Agnes," said Josephine, also perceiving him, and speaking low and hurriedly. "I appreciate your kindness to me fully."

And then Olin, who was regarding them and just coming into earshot, was astonished to see his aunt apparently without reason kiss her companion.

"Why this unseemly spooning?" he inquired, although there was a light of unmistakable gratification in his eyes.

"Is that you, Olin?" replied his aunt without turning her head. "How are you going to kill time this afternoon?"

"That is a singularly unfortunate question, as it happens," replied the young man. "It is a libel on my intention to ask Miss Ivison if I may escort her to Little Harbor, where she wants to make a sketch."

"That was quite too bad of me," admitted Miss Norman with mock contrition.

"Miss Ivison has told me," continued Olin, "that an awe of horns deters her in her artistic pursuits, and I offer my services as an entirely reliable cow-diverter."

"My dear girl, you need n't be in the least afraid of the cows on this island," declared Agnes. "They are used to being milked and cared for by women and they are much more likely to attack Olin than they are you."

"All the better for Miss Josephine. Would you deprive her of the opportunity to sketch a toreador from life? Aunt Agnes is astonishingly valiant just now, but ask her how she enjoys encountering one of these innocent little green snakes. Did n't you ever observe that high-stepping, studious air with which she crosses the long grass in the field? Not that there ever was a snake there."

Miss Norman shrugged her shoulders in a shudder.

"There are a few snakes on the island," she said reluctantly, "but from earliest times there has been no paradise without the serpent, and I suppose it is their inheritance to approach women. Olin never sees one. Do take him with you, my dear, if you can make any use of him. It is a charity to employ him when he is not sailing."

"I am always meeting the oxen in unexpected places, and they are so big," returned Josephine, "and yes, I don't like the cows either. I should be very glad to go to Little Harbor, Mr. Randolph. Thank you for remembering it."

"There is Dickie, still demolishing strawberries," remarked Olin, indicating a little red hat close to the grass a few rods away. "The flag will be flying at half-mast for him, Aunt Agnes, if you don't interfere; but wait till we're out of sight, I prithee."

When Josephine had procured her materials and the couple had gone, Agnes looked thoughtfully

after them a moment and then entered the Sea Shell.

"Who was that went with Miss Josephine?" asked Persis, who was sitting by the kitchen table cracking lobsters and throwing the meat into a bowl.

"Mr. Randolph."

Miss Applebee laughed out. "I thought so. First he takes one of 'em, then another, and afterward the next, and again all three. I tell the doctor he can't marry 'em all."

"Why, Persis," returned Miss Agnes, "you are startling. Give me a claw."

Miss Applebee wrenched off the desired dainty and passed it into the waiting hand.

"Oh, I see about all that's goin'," she remarked, "for all I don't have time to go round as much as the rest of you."

"Well, it seems to me you're disposing of my nephew rather high-handedly," returned Miss Norman, taking the red shell between her teeth and forcing out the meat.

"Oh, no; he's bound to fall in love with one o' the orphans, if he hangs around 'em as much as he does. If he don't think they're pretty good comp'ny, what's he here for? He never set foot on the island all last summer, as you know very well. The summer afore he turned up his nose at it and went off to Europe. Do you remember the ride he took us up to Brunswick one September? How that boy acted and cavorted that day! He was full o' the old Nick!"

"The sour apples?" asked Miss Norman, smiling.

"Yes," laughed Persis, one hand on her fat side. "He fed 'em to the horse and said he was in hopes o' givin' him the colic, so's he'd go faster."

Miss Agnes shook her head. "You need n't make any matches, Persis. When Olin falls in love it won't be with three girls at once."

"Well, I know that's the way 't is with me," sighed Miss Applebee. "I try to choose betwixt 'em, and it's a fact I can't. They're as faithful and good as they can be about helpin' me, and whichever one's with me at the time I think the most on."

"I am glad it has turned out so. You might have had trouble to change the plan if it had not proved pleasant. The doctor, I judge, is as well pleased as you are."

"Indeed he is. Why, he eats just twice what he did before he came down. Anybody can see he's growin' stout."

"What did he say when you told him Olin could n't marry the three girls?"

"Oh, he just looked pleasant. That's the way he answers mostly, you know."

"Has he a favorite himself, do you think?"

"No, I guess he's in the same fix I am. But it's my belief Olin'll simmer down to one. Why, this island is a powerful romantic place," said Persis, deftly pursuing her work. "Take a day like this, when the White Mountains are standin'

there in plain sight and the wind comin' across the sea and singin' love-songs to every beauty o' natur', why, I feel as romantic as the next one myself. I don't know whether to scallop these or make 'em into salad," she continued musingly.

"Salad; and don't let Olin know it or he will visit you without any regard to the orphans."

"I'll send him in a dish. Yes, ma'am, these rocks and woods are full o' pitfalls for a man's heart if he's helpin' a pretty girl through 'em."

"I don't think Olin has become conscious of his heart, and my sister and I do not want to spare him to any one," returned Miss Norman, rising; "but romance away, Persis, it is a harmless amusement if you confide in no one but the doctor and me; do not suggest, even in joke, such a thing to the girls themselves."

"T ain't likely," observed Persis dryly. "I like to see roses bloom first-rate. I hain't ever pulled one open yet."

CHAPTER XVI.

MOUNT PISGAH.

PERSIS continued, as she described her own prudence, to keep her eyes open and her mouth shut. Mr. Randolph was supremely unconscious that she considered it a momentous thing that he so often in the days that followed accompanied Josephine on her sketching expeditions, and that young lady when she returned to the house, her fingers decorated with colored chalk in more hues than ever were on sky or sea, failed entirely, as she displayed her sketch to Miss Applebee, to read the signs of pursed mouth and furtive glance with which the housekeeper regarded the pastel and then the artist's pleased face.

"It does look a little like it, does n't it, Persis?" the girl would say, critically regarding the sketch.

"It looks very like it to me," the housekeeper would reply significantly, and for the next half-hour would chuckle to herself over her own clever ambiguity.

"You ain't givin' Mr. Randolph paintin' lessons, are you?" she asked Josephine one day. "He seems to be goin' along pretty reg'lar."

"No indeed," returned the girl carelessly. "He says he likes to read aloud. It is very good-natured of him, for I don't have to keep watch for the cattle any more. We have very pleasant times."

"I hain't a doubt of it," replied Persis, hastening into the kitchen, where she grew apoplectic in the darkest corner with appreciation of her own subtlety.

But if Miss Applebee found this potential courtship a laughing matter, the youngest of her guests did not. Vernon was often invited to accompany the pair, but she invariably refused, preferring to rush down to the cove, and, jumping into what Captain Amos termed a flo't, find vent for her feelings in muscular exertion. Other vent they never found, for Vernon had plenty of pride, and not even Helen should suspect the emotions which were thus worked off in a wholesome manner, as she sent her little boat flying out from the wooded shore.

One pleasant early evening Josephine was helping Persis wash the supper dishes. The sound of gay voices out of doors came through the open windows. Olin, Miss Agnes, Vernon and Dickie were playing an exciting game of bean-bags, in which four bags were kept flying at one time, and an occasional shriek bore witness to the mishaps which attended a failure to look in two directions at once.

Dr. Latimer had returned that afternoon from a

trip of several days to Boston, where Persis told the girls he had probably gone to oversee personally the progress of certain of his philanthropic undertakings.

"You may be pretty certain he didn't go on any pleasant errand," Miss Applebee remarked now, as she took the glasses from the steaming water. "I don't know as ever I knew the doctor of late years to do anythin' just to please himself. Such a boy as he was once, too, full o' life, always cuttin' up and raisin' Cain." Persis sighed heavily and shook her head.

"What made him change so?" asked Josephine.

"Oh, the cares o' life," returned Persis vaguely. "'The cares o' life,' my mother used to say, 'are many and multiplicarious,' and so they be. Yes, half the time I declare to goodness I forget the doctor's younger'n I am; he seems so settled down."

"I don't think one considers age in connection with Dr. Latimer," returned Josephine musingly. "He seems so different, so apart from other men."

"Why, he ain't forty-five yet," said Persis, "but of course his gray hair and his ways make him seem older. He'll get done with life sooner than most, I expect," and she sighed again.

"Don't say that."

"Oh, well, 't won't make much difference whether I say it or not, I s'pose; but I guess folks have just about so much given 'em in the way o' strength, and when a body's like Dr. Latimer and

does n't care how quick he uses up his share just so it's used for other people, why 't ain't apt to last long. Most folks'll take all that's given to 'em, you know that; don't you? Well, he's always givin', givin'. He don't care the turn of his hand how soon it's all gone," Persis dashed away a tear with the back of her wrist, "and when he does come to die if everybody he's blessed should foller the funeral he'd have a train longer 'n any that's ever been seen yet."

"Don't talk so," protested Josephine quickly.

"Then what does he want to go philanderin' off for when he's takin' his vacation?" retorted Miss Applebee. "He puts me out of all patience. When I taxed him with lookin' worn out he admitted he'd been up all night at a deathbed. I say he" —

The appearance of Dr. Latimer himself at the window checked the troubled woman's speech.

"Miss Josephine, the sunset is going to be fine," he said. "Would you like to come with me to see it?"

"I am not quite" — began the girl eagerly.

"Yes, go right along," interrupted Persis. "We're all through. Now, don't wait, for the sun's goin' to set just such a time, and dishes can be put away any hour o' the day or night."

Josephine snatched up a shawl and joined the doctor. She looked at the group on the grass. They had stopped their game and were resting, with flushed, laughing faces. She glanced at

Agnes, but the latter did not appear to observe that for once she was supplanted.

Dr. Latimer led the way through a narrow path worn amid the long grass of the field where Captain Liph had that day begun mowing. They came out upon the one beaten road of the island which led over a rise of ground and then descended nearly to a level with the sea, losing itself in a thick, fragrant avenue of firs and spruces. This wood-road was bordered on one side by the cove, bright glimpses of which showed through the trees, and on the other by a hill, the highest point of the island, which had been named Mount Pisgah. This height Dr. Latimer had chosen as their destination. They turned out of the road and began its ascent.

"First," he said, "I want you to share an unwritten poem which until now I have kept entirely to myself." They walked a few steps through the long grass, then the doctor paused.

"You see where those two rocks set their shoulders out of the hillside, making a cozy nook between them? Come nearer and look."

Josephine obeyed and in the angle formed by the boulders she saw a little nest. Above it, rooted in the scanty earth, grew a fern. Three exquisite fronds arched gracefully above the nest, and under their shade the mother bird was brooding her eggs. The stillness was absolute. Near by, dark, rugged trees rose from the hillside and lichens clung to the granite pushing itself through

the earth round about. The delicate fern seemed to have grown in that rough place, drawn by sheer sympathy toward the downy home in its hard setting.

They stood half a minute motionless, then Josephine looked up into her companion's face.

"Thank you," she said, radiant with pleasure.

He smiled and gave her his hand for the steep ascent which lay before them.

Arrived at the top of the hill, a scene was unveiled which the girl never forgot. The western horizon was on fire and the thick smoke of clouds was being changed from glory to glory by enveloping flames. At last the west burned with a steady red-gold, against which Washington and its fellow peaks stood revealed.

The cove took on deep, rosy tints, while at the east of the island the ocean darkened to purple, and distant white sails seemed to stand still upon its breast. Above, where the sky showed blue as it stretched away from the western flame, the silver thread of a new moon, attended by one diamond star, revealed its gentle beauty.

Josephine and her companion stood in silence for a time, watching the changing pageant, then their eyes met and the doctor quoted: —

"A common island, you will say;
But stay a moment: only climb
Up to the highest rock of the isle,
Stand there alone for a little while,
And with gentle approaches it grows sublime,
Dilating slowly, as you win
A sense from the silence to take it in."

"But Lowell insists on the loneliness," said Josephine. "A little farther on he repeats:—

"Only be sure you go alone,
For Grandeur is inaccessiblely proud"—

"Yes," returned the doctor quietly; "but in the companionship of two congenial spirits there is found the perfection of solitude."

The girl thrilled at his words.

"The beacons are flashing out," he continued. "There are Cape Elizabeth, and Half-Way Light, and Seguin," indicating the points burning in the distance. "Mute preachers those lights are to me. What better reminder does a man need of his duty to cheer and warn and protect his brother-man amid the reefs of life? I always think of 'Let your light so shine,' when I see them."

"I do not believe you need those reminders," replied Josephine, with the courage born of the honor he had paid her. "You need rather to be held back than pressed forward."

Dr. Latimer gave his amused smile. "Persis has been talking to you," he said.

"Oh, supposing she has," returned the girl beseechingly. "Do you—do you think it is right for a man to be wasteful of himself?"

"Decidedly not," answered the other gently. "Before the light goes I want to get for you some wild roses which grow at their best in certain hollows up here."

He walked away, and Josephine, her heart puls-

ing with its emotions, not least among which was wonder at her own temerity, wiped away hurriedly the tears which would spring to her eyes. Persis had agitated her, the glories of sky and sea had stirred her deeply, and she could not analyze all that swelled her heart until it seemed as though it must burst.

Dr. Latimer soon returned, cutting away the thorns from the long stems of such wild roses as are seldom seen. The half-curved, crisp petals were rich in color and size, and the long stems bore a wealth of green leaves.

Beautiful as the offering was, Josephine could not speak as he placed it in her hand. He was surprised by her silence, and regarded the roses with attentive admiration.

"These are as fine as any I have ever found," he said. "I had no idea what a wild rose might become until I discovered these on the island. They vary in different localities even here, but they seldom dwindle to the proportions of the ordinary flower."

He looked at Josephine for a response and the girl was panic-stricken by her own weakness and lack of self-control. Only now she realized how she had been permitting a sentiment to grow until its roots striking into the depths of her being, it overshadowed and dominated all else in her life.

"They are beautiful. Forgive me. I can't talk," she returned spasmodically, more disturbed

by the annoyance she was giving than by any fear of betraying herself.

"Why, you are crying!" he exclaimed involuntarily in his astonishment.

"And I don't know what for," she replied, "so wait a — minute."

Dr. Latimer stood before her, feeling extraordinarily undecided, but his unselfish habit of thought — his clairvoyance, as it was sometimes called — came to his aid.

"Persis has been frightening you seriously," he said, and even as he spoke a novel chain of thought was begun which disturbed him strangely.

Why should it frighten this girl to be told stories of danger to himself? He had spoken too quickly, and said an indelicate and unwise thing.

"Yes," returned Josephine, regaining control of her voice and speaking low but firmly. "Persis did frighten me. What she said was in accord with all else I have heard of you. It came over me a moment ago overwhelmingly, that, spite of all which might be said and done to dissuade you, you would spend your life, risk it, and in the end lose it and leave us all" —

She stopped, for her voice again refused its office.

"Are you sure you are well, Miss Josephine?" he asked, made perplexed and anxious by her intense tone.

"Oh, Dr. Latimer, you are severe!" she exclaimed.

"I severe to you? You know that would be impossible," he answered in a shocked voice; "but the fear you express is so surprising — so little founded. You have been misinformed" — the speaker paused in his stiff utterance, his self-possession shaken by this surprising experience. Something throbbing in the air they were breathing told him this ebullition of feeling exceeded ordinary gratitude, yet he was too bewildered to formulate his thoughts.

"You go often amidst contagion; is n't it so?" asked the girl.

"Yes, but so does every doctor."

"You are not in the profession now."

"Illness compelled me to drop a regular practice, but I have regained my health since those days, and naturally I use my knowledge wherever it will be of use."

"You sacrifice yourself every week and every day!" exclaimed Josephine passionately.

"I have had no one to fear for me but Persis for many years," replied the doctor, "and she conceals her sentiments from me, if she has such apprehensions as you express. It is certainly unwarrantable in her now to practice upon your tender-heartedness. You must make large allowances for the faithful creature who took care of me when I was a child, and would like to keep the same watch and ward now. I shall have to speak to her about this. As a physician I cannot allow her folly to make you suffer."

In the waning light Josephine looked at him with sad eyes. "I am not very tender-hearted, I believe," she answered, "and I certainly am not at all nervous; but I see your position. Persis is right. The risk you constantly run does not seem important to you. You are indifferent to life."

"You are wrong. For years life has seemed tolerable to me."

"Tolerable?"

Dr. Latimer's deep eyes returned her gaze. "You do not know how much that means to a man who has ever found it intolerable. But I am not saying enough. I have even thanked God that He permitted me to live and work."

Josephine clasped her hands tightly together under the fleecy shawl. "I am so far away from you," she said, drawing a deep breath, and there was such pain and longing in her voice that involuntarily her companion drew a step nearer her. "I cannot understand you," she added.

"Neither can I understand you," the doctor had nearly returned, but he repressed the words. Amid the unwontedness of his position there was stealing a charm and sweetness more disquieting than the rest.

"I was right in one point, however. You are indifferent to life. That, I suppose, is natural to a man of your temperament whom the pleasures of this life do not tempt and who has no friend dear enough to compel him to try to live."

The girl spoke firmly, and Dr. Latimer had a

strange sensation of being a culprit. It was long since his thoughts had been turned in upon himself for so long a period, and he felt the awkwardness consequent to any man upon being brought face to face with and compelled to recognize the acquaintance who in all the world occupies him least.

"I am very well," he answered meekly, feeling called upon, somehow, to defend himself. "I have not saved myself, perhaps, but what reason was there why I should? I could not be better spent than in such service as I have found to do."

"But I can't — we could n't spare you, the girls and I," responded Josephine unsteadily. "You have been so good to us that we can't help — oh, I know that because you have been kind to us is no reason why we should even attempt to hold you back from what you think right, but Miss Norman herself says you are reckless, and if you only cared half as much for — us as we do for you, you would promise not to take such great risks, when you are not strong. Everybody says you are not strong."

Dr. Latimer had sustained varied species of assaults from the other sex during his lonely life, but the tacit flattery of this girl whom he had always known so dignified and self-controlled gave him sensations of an entirely novel character and wakened long-latent emotions.

There was silence when the vibrating voice ceased, such silence as falls on Mount Pisgah when the sea is sleeping. Away to the south,

Half-Way Light paled and flushed from white to red. The rosy beacon had faded and flamed white again before the doctor spoke: —

“I shall remember what you have said,” he answered.

“And forgive me for it, too?” she asked, her heart beating with the fear of vexing him.

He waited again before speaking.

“It is a great many years since anybody has talked to me as you have,” he answered simply, “and I find it makes life seem fairer to know that I have such a friend in you.”

After this Josephine did not know how she descended the dim, rugged hillside, except that her hand was in his because the way was steep and sometimes rough.

They passed the bird's nest and moved side by side through the field where the air was sweet with hay that Captain Liph would rake to-morrow. The slender moon was sailing westward, while, level with Seguin light, and looking like its twin in all but color, shone Jupiter.

The doctor and his companion paused a minute after reaching the cottages to wonder at the track of light which the planet as it rose sent shimmering across the ocean.

But soon Josephine said she must go in, and the doctor did not dissuade her.

“Good-night,” he returned, in the voice she thought the most beautiful in the world. “I will walk a little while. I do not quite recognize my-

self this evening. It is a strange experience to a man when the life he has led for twenty years receives an interruption."

His tone made her heart beat.

"I suppose you do not understand me," he continued quietly.

"I hope I do," she answered so low that he scarcely caught the words, then she disappeared within the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

ROSE LANE.

UP in the airy chamber of the Sea Shell Helen and Vernon were tossing and turning well-sunned mattresses and making beds the next morning, while Josephine assisted Persis. The eldest of the sisters found a great charm in the little kitchen, where the housekeeper was so easily drawn on to scold or praise her master and tell anecdotes of his boyhood.

"What is the matter with Jo this morning?" asked Vernon, as she and Helen drew a sheet over one of the beds. "She is so queer, and absent-minded, and handsome."

"I noticed it, too," answered Helen, "and did n't you think Dr. Latimer behaved strangely, too? He kept looking at nothing in the oddest way, and everything I said to him at breakfast I had to repeat before he heard me."

"They have been getting up some joke," said Vernon discontentedly, "or else they have a secret. I hate secrets unless I am in them."

"Perhaps Dr. Latimer has sent for Mr. Bruch," suggested Helen, folding the sheet over the counterpane with attentive precision.

"Pooh! As though that would make Josephine's eyes full of 'fire and dew' and make her kiss me. She did this morning before we went downstairs."

"Well, if you don't like it you can console yourself with the fact that you don't have to bear it very often."

"When I am kissed I like to know what for," responded Vernon, slapping a pillow vigorously, "yes, and *who* for," she added with a last thump. "Josephine might have been thinking of the man in the moon. She was n't thinking of me, that is certain, and there are some people on whose account I don't care to be kissed."

"What are you talking about, Vernon?"

"Ask Dr. Latimer. He seems to be in Jo's confidence."

"If Dr. Latimer wishes to surprise us with Mr. Bruch's arrival, I don't want to spoil his kind plan," said Helen confidentially, "but I happened to see a letter addressed to him not long ago lying on the doctor's desk. I could n't help thinking it might be an invitation."

"Oh, that is just your soft-hearted foolishness, Helen. You want him to have the change, and so you have planned it, but you know the doctor has n't a place to put him."

"There will be room in the Nautilus after Mr. Randolph goes," suggested Helen, looking at her sister thoughtfully.

"When is Mr. Randolph going?"

"I don't know; but I don't see how he can stay so very much longer, — a young business man like him, you know."

"I suppose you would like to shorten his vacation so Mr. Bruch could have a longer one," remarked the youngest resentfully.

Helen laughed. "I did n't notice which side of the bed you got out on this morning, Vernon, but whichever it was, please try the other to-morrow. We want some roses for the bowls downstairs. Here, put on your hat and go after them. You need to let some sunshine strike in."

Vernon obeyed the gentle push, and putting on the soft, red felt hat which either she or Dickie wore as it happened to be in one house or the other, went downstairs for the basket and scissors.

Captain Liph was leaning in the doorway, and Persis, her hands on her hips, was interviewing him.

"I cal'late t' kill to-day," remarked the old man's mellifluous tones, as he nodded kindly to Vernon.

"Well, I want a hind-quarter," replied Persis decidedly.

Captain Liph looked perplexed. "Seems if everybody had to have the hind-quarter," he remarked. "Ther's ben six hind-quarters ordered off 'n that sheep this mornin'."

"Well, now, Cap'n Liph, you know I spoke long ago," returned the housekeeper, too anxious to be affected by anything ludicrous in the di-

lemma. "Says I to you, when you kill the next time" —

Vernon slipped by them out of doors and passed Dr. Latimer and Agnes Norman, who were laying their heads together over a list of errands for Portland, where the doctor was to betake himself that morning.

They nodded to her pleasantly. "Goin' perch-in'?" asked Agnes in native fisher language.

"No, going rosing," answered Vernon as she passed.

"And there won't be a bud in the lane with a fresher and a sweeter face than yours," remarked Miss Norman, looking after the light figure.

Dr. Latimer also followed the girl with his glance.

"Youth loves youth," he said in his thoughtful way, "but it requires maturity to appreciate the beauty, the intrinsic charm of youth. While we are young we take it all for granted."

Miss Norman gave an odd little smile. "If youth always did love youth," she returned, "it would save complications sometimes."

The intense blue of the doctor's eyes looked quickly into hers. There was an expression in his face that was new to her.

"Don't you think that in exceptional cases youth is the victim of a species of infatuation and should be saved from itself?" he asked seriously.

Miss Norman was startled. She began to believe that her secret suspicions were shared. A

number of arguments and considerations flashed through her mind in the instant of her hesitation ; then she spoke with a smile and a shake of the head.

"I believe no rules can be laid down that anything so erratic as the human heart will follow."

"No, but experience should protect inexperience."

"And in doing so," returned Miss Norman, "experience should take care not to be morbid."

"There is far more danger of its being selfish, is n't there?"

"That depends on whose experience is in question. We were speaking, were we not, of the rare case where a girl loves a man many years her senior?"

"Thinks she does," corrected the other. "Where her feeling is but an enthusiasm and hero worship, which has come into being through her own false conceptions of the man."

"I see what you mean. The girl is loving an ideal. Well, that is what most girls do, and, provided she is a girl of character and the object of her affection is a good man, who returns her love, I should say it was a foolish rejection of blessing for him to let the matter of years stand between them."

The strange, luminous expression in her companion's eyes grew still deeper.

"You are influencing me to see it as you do. I" — he stopped, as though restraining himself.

She changed color. "If you have something to decide for yourself, God would be very good to me, Paul, if I might do anything, however slight, to help atone for the past."

"Agnes," he said, and his voice held reproach and warning, "I thought you had thrown off forever those morbid feelings. I am sure you have been convinced many times of your own innocence; indeed, your utter helplessness. Why do you return to the old thought?"

"One thing can exorcise it, and that is your happiness." Miss Norman's voice was unsteady. "Give me a sight of that, and I shall be at rest and grateful, — oh, how grateful!"

They were both shaken, these two self-possessed, middle-aged friends, so deeply that each turned instinctively for relief to the prosaic care of the moment. Miss Norman looked through swimming eyes at the list whereon coffee, tea, canned tomatoes, etc., were blurred the more by the trembling of the hand with which Dr. Latimer held the paper, and they fell to talking of some fruit she wished him to buy.

Vernon walked to the end of Maiden Lane and across the grass to Captain Amos' house. Mr. Randolph, who had been calling there to return some fishing tackle, came out of the door as she passed.

"Where are you going, my pretty maid?" he asked.

"Oh, good-morning."

"That is n't any answer. May I go with you, my pretty maid?"

"Are you under the impression that you are quoting? That is n't the way it goes at all."

"It is all one to me so long as I go," returned Olin cheerfully.

They passed Aunt Martha's bright little flower garden, where blue, pink, and purple bachelor-buttons, and gay, rose-colored mallows peeped through the wide meshes of the fishnet which surrounded them. A sunken tub filled with water furnished a paradise for some soft little ducklings, all bill, feet, and ambition, who plunged and scrambled and whisked their rudimentary tails, as Vernon and Olin passed.

The morning breeze rustled the leaves of two ragged Balm-of-Gilead trees that showed by their sparse foliage the hard battle for life which the winter had given them.

"What is it to-day, — fir balsam?" asked Olin.

"No, roses. Don't let me take you from your important pursuits. I am not in the least afraid of cows."

Vernon tossed her head slightly and her companion's eyes twinkled.

"Sarcasm on a morning like this, and just as you are entering Rose Lane?"

"Oh, well, I only wanted to preserve you from misplaced exertion. I can't even pretend to be afraid of anything," said Vernon, pausing where a tangled thicket of roses and raspberry bushes ran

riot, and beginning to snip the tough stems in a business-like manner. Mr. Randolph, his thumbs caught in the edge of his trousers pockets, watched her.

"Don't you want to let me do that?" he asked

"Thank you, no."

"You are n't getting the best blossoms," he added, after a long pause.

"Is that your idea of division of labor? I to do the work and you to criticise?"

"I asked you to let me reverse it. Don't you see those big beauties there near the wall?"

Vernon measured the distance with a furtive glance. The undergrowth into which she must step to reach the deep-glowing roses held mysterious possibilities which made her cringe.

"Oh, these will do well enough," she replied carelessly, going on with her cutting.

Olin smiled from his vantage-ground behind her.

"How you do put me in mind of *Æsop*," he remarked. "Don't you remember the picture where the fox is leering so sentimentally at the grapes?"

"You seem to be full of nursery reminiscences this morning." Vernon's cheeks matched her flowers. "If you think those roses are sour grapes to me, I shall have to show you how easily you may be mistaken," and repressing a shudder the speaker stepped firmly down into the thicket. She had taken a few steps and reached a blossom whose spicy, half-folded petals had been coveted ever since the moment she entered the lane, when

something — a tough bramble or a live horror — moved about her ankle.

With a shriek and one sudden leap she vaulted back into the path, her basket flying one way, her scissors another. She gazed at Olin, both hands on her heart and her face showing pale beneath the sun-tint.

"There was one!" she exclaimed in hollow tones.

"Well, you've given me nervous prostration for life," said Olin. "What is the matter?"

"There was one, I tell you!"

"I know there was, — one basket, one pair of scissors, one girl, and one rose. The rose seems the only one of the group not knocked out."

"It wound around my ankle! Oh! Supposing it should be there now!" Vernon spoke with tragical haste, her eyes dilating.

"What?"

"The sn— Oh!"

"Why don't you look?"

"Look!" She gazed at him with excited reproach. "Why, it might be there. How could I look?"

"Let me, then." Olin stooped on one knee and regarded the low tennis shoes and black-stockinged ankles the short skirt revealed.

"Well?" faintly.

"Not a thing there. Did you think you felt a snake?"

"I know I did. How could you ask me to go into such a place!"

"I did n't ask you."

"You did worse; you dared me."

"I did n't mean to; but knowing by your own assertion that you were not afraid of anything" —

"I should be ashamed not to be afraid of such a revolting creature as a snake," returned Vernon with heat.

Olin looked quizzically at her and shook his head. "Little girls who fling sarcasms at their big sisters get punished, you see. I could write a moral tale with you for a text."

"Well, before I would be afraid of cows!"

"I am glad Miss Josephine is. It makes a poor mortal feel more comfortable with her to find she has a weakness."

"I love to discover a weakness in Josephine, too," replied Vernon, with a sudden fellow-feeling for her companion. "Do you," with elaborate nonchalance, "do you see the scissors anywhere, Mr. Randolph?"

He was sitting on the grass, and here cast a cursory glance about him. "No," he answered.

The basket had lodged upside down between two rose-bushes just out of reach unless one stepped down again into the undergrowth.

"I am sorry I brought that pair," continued Vernon in indifferent tone but with wistful eyes that looked searchingly here and there. "Persis won't like to lose them."

"I am placed in a very uncomfortable position," declared Olin seriously.

"You don't look it," she retorted.

"Of course I am very desirous of hunting for your scissors, but you despise anybody who is not afraid of snakes, so I am hampered, tied hand and foot, as it were, by my desire to retain your good opinion."

"You need n't worry about that," returned Vernon, reddening. "It's too late. I don't like you at all." She gazed down at her viking with bright, vexed eyes.

"Then I've nothing to lose by diving into that tangle," he returned, regarding the pretty face admiringly.

"Nothing."

"Have I anything to gain?"

"The scissors, I hope," returned Vernon curtly, notwithstanding the rather sentimental significance of his tone.

"Nothing else? Not your forgiveness for having offered to cut your roses for you?"

"Don't bargain," replied the girl loftily.

"Say," he returned, continuing to regard her musingly, "I wish while you are down here you would wear a hat with a brim or a veil or something to protect your complexion a little. Your nose is getting" —

"What is my nose to you?" exclaimed Vernon, exasperated.

"A joy forever in its pristine condition; but a girl's nose does n't want to be treated like a meerschau pipe" —

"Let me remind you that my complexion is my own, sir."

"But you injure my æsthetic sense."

"Take it back to Boston, then. That is where æsthetic senses belong."

"You appear irritated."

"Why, not at all. Don't you think the sun is growing rather warm? I believe I had better be going back."

"Oh, very well." Olin rose to his feet. "You think that you won't wait for another harvest of roses." He walked to the side of the lane and reached over for the basket. Vernon watched him with interest.

"How can I get them without any scissors?" she asked. "They are so thorny."

"The lane is fuller of thorns than usual this morning. I have noticed it."

"Roses would be badly off without them," returned Vernon, with hot cheeks.

The young man regarded her, slightly smiling. She bit her lip. No one had ever before had power to ruffle her so easily, and she felt resentful and humiliated.

"No rose without its thorn," he remarked, musingly.

"How entertainingly original," she mocked.

"Look here, why are you vexed with me?" asked Olin curiously, advancing to her, basket in hand.

Vernon met his gaze with an innocent, wonder-

ing glance. Supposing she should tell him the truth. How would it sound to say that she was vexed with him because Josephine had kissed her that morning. The thought made her laugh, and two little tears dimmed the lustre of her lovely eyes.

"How absurd!" she exclaimed.

"Well, I am glad that you agree with me. Promise that you won't rend me any more, and then sit down over there on that mossy stone while I find the scissors."

Vernon shuddered and watched him apprehensively as he tramped into the thicket of wild growth, and dove about among the brambles. By good fortune it was not long before he emerged with the prize.

"Thank you, so much," said the girl gratefully. "It is Persis' pet pair, and I suspect she will scold me anyway for taking them. Now, I suppose I ought to cut some more roses."

"No, don't just now. Let us go over to the water and get cool, then we can come back this way, if you like."

Vernon agreed silently, and went with him to the sea, where they sat on the rocks. The water below was so instinct with movement, color, and sound that it seemed a live thing.

Olin half reclined, leaning on his elbow in an attitude facing his companion, and the bright wind sped ceaseless past them.

"Here we can rest from our labors and you can

meditate on your — thorns," he suggested, comfortably.

"You like to tease, don't you?" observed Vernon, who felt in a state of serene contentment with the moment which not even the thought of Josephine could mar.

"How like a flight of birds those fishing-boats look yonder," said Olin lazily.

"If e'er you sail on Casco Bay
When fields are green and skies are sweet,
And watch the foam-capped waves at play,
Where land and sea touch hands, and greet
As friend with friend in rude delight,
Your soul, like birds at break of day,
Will rise for many a joyous flight
'Midst summer isles of Casco Bay.
Of Casco Bay! sweet Casco Bay!
Where life is joy and love at play
'Midst summer isles of Casco Bay.'"

"We should be in a boat while you repeat that," said Vernon. "I think it is very shabby of you that you have never asked me into your boat."

"I've been invited not to."

"By whom?"

"Aunt Agnes. She has requested me never to take Miss Ivison, either Number One, Number Two, or Number Three, sailing, especially Number Three."

"Why not me, especially?"

"Because you are the youngest, the — pet, of course."

"Oh, do you think I am?" asked Vernon, naïvely. "Don't you think Josephine is more of a pet than I am?"

"Miss Josephine a 'pet!' Shades of Diana!"

"Well, a favorite I mean. Anyway, why did n't Miss Agnes want you to take us?"

"Afraid I'd drown you."

"Nonsense!" indignantly. "As though a vik—as though you could n't sail a boat!"

"That is what I implied as strongly as my natural modesty would permit, but both my aunts insisted that the privilege of drowning you belonged entirely to Dr. Latimer. All the plums seem to come under the doctor's piece this summer. Yes, boating and drowning are synonyms at the Nautilus. The miracle of seeing me return alive from such expeditions all my life has lost none of its marvel for my aunts, although of nearly daily occurrence every summer. They have taken their lives in their hands and sailed with Captain Amos at times when necessity compelled, but I've no doubt that when the Harpswell Steamship Company arranged to have its boats touch here my aunts put up pious thanks and praise, and accepted a new lease of life."

"You have n't sailed very much this summer?"

"No; Aunt Agnes says I am too lazy."

"I don't believe you are."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't wish to."

"What? All the thorns nicely folded under the leaves?"

"Don't look at me, please."

"Why not?"

"You have made me conscious by your uncivil comments. Look back at the ships, and the gulls, and repeat some more poetry."

Olin supported his head on his hand.

" 'Down smiling channels shadows run
And shimmer on the green-blue tides;
And, booming like a far-off gun,
Where Harpswell sea from sea divides,
You hear the breakers' sullen roar
And watch the waves ascend in spray,
While all around, behind, before,
The white sails swell on Casco Bay;
On Casco Bay! fair Casco Bay!
The white sails fill, and bear away
The happy ships on Casco Bay.' "

"That is it," said Vernon fervently. "'The happy ships on Casco Bay.' They look blessed. Why could n't I have written that poem? I have felt it all and more."

Olin smiled. "That is what poets are for, — to give tongue to that which is struggling for expression in the breasts of the myriads of us who are dumb."

"It was a libel on you to say you did not like the island," said Vernon indignantly.

"I have never enjoyed it so much as this summer."

"Indeed?"

"No, and the papers say it is very warm in town. I wonder how Bruch is getting on."

"Helen was talking about him this morning."

You know how soft-hearted she is. She feels sorry for him, he is so alone."

"So do I. Somehow, I hate to think of old Bruch fighting mosquitoes in a lodging-house and looking at his German watch evenings. I spoke to Dr. Latimer about it and found that part of my suspicion was unfounded. It seems that the doctor was so thoughtful as to give him a room in that big, cool house of his, where he has good food and service."

"What a darling Dr. Latimer is!"

"Oh — a — yes ; but still Bruch is alone and has lots of time on his hands to think about the little ones, and of course, as the doctor said, the Sea Shell is full, and so I asked my aunts if they would take him in my place. You see the chambered Nautilus in this case has n't chambers enough."

"Oh, did you?" Vernon's tone indicated a diminution of interest in Mr. Bruch's situation. "Could n't we find room in some one of the cottages where they would let him stay?"

"That is just what we at last succeeded in doing. The Cliffords are going to give him a bed, and my aunts are kind enough to let him come to our table as a favor to me. We thought as there was no great variety down here we would let Mr. Bruch surprise his Boston friends. I have told you because I must go to the boat soon to meet him, and I thought you might like to come, too, and give him a welcome."

Upon consulting his watch Olin found that they

had not time to stop for the roses, but Vernon accompanied him to the dock with alacrity; and when the Chebeague came steaming around from Harpswell, among the passengers under its awning appeared the spectacled and bearded countenance of the professor.

Dr. Latimer was on the pier, about to take the same steamer back to Portland, and Mr. Bruch's face fairly beamed as he nodded ecstatically toward the three familiar faces.

The exchange from the damp, muggy heat at present afflicting Boston, to this crystal clear, cool air was a delight which the sight of the kindly friends augmented.

The professor, owing to his polite consideration, was one of the last passengers to climb the steep gang-plank. Dr. Latimer had time only for a word and a cordial hand-pressure before going on board the boat, but Olin and Vernon were the willing recipients of the newcomer's happy garrulity.

Olin put his valise into Captain Amos' wagon and then the three moved slowly up the hill.

"The papers say Boston has had a hot wave," remarked Randolph.

"Wave is a good word, yes," returned the professor earnestly. "It has been a fearful weather, like in a laundry. There were — oh, yes — a great many mosquitoes, too. If I ventured from the house they pinched me. This is a new world, a new world my dear sir. I am so grateful to you as I can be. You are happy here, Miss Vernon, yes?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WOOD ROAD.

THE child-like exultation of the professor at finding himself once more among the best friends he possessed this side that broad sea which now stretched before his eyes, made itself pleasantly felt all through the cliff community. Had Miss Charlotte chosen to exhibit her most majestic mood Mr. Bruch would have accepted the dispensation meekly; but on this occasion the elder Miss Norman elected to be ungrudgingly gracious and hospitable, and after the supper, to which the professor did ample and admiring justice, she declared her conviction to Agnes that he was a good creature and she did not wonder at all that Olin wished to give him this pleasure.

Mr. Bruch rambled up and down the grass after tea talking with Josephine, Helen, and the doctor, who had made short work of the Portland errands and returned. The strong wind, which all day long had swept the little island as though blowing across the deck of a ship, was sinking with the sinking sun. Rest, quiet, peace, breathed from every rock and tree.

"I seem to feel nearer the little ones here," said

the German to Helen, as they stood together near the cliff railing.

"They are only the other side of that purple water," she answered cheerfully. "By another summer you must have them with you."

"Sooner than that, I hope," he answered. "I cannot wait so long, Miss Helen. Either I go there or they come to me before a year."

"Let us all go to Mount Pisgah," called Vernon, hastening out of the Sea Shell, where she had been wiping the dishes for Persis. "We are a little late, but Mr. Bruch can see the last of the sunset."

So they set out, a straggling procession, through the mowed field and up the hilly road. Both the Miss Normans and Dickie, Olin, the three girls, Mr. Bruch and Dr. Latimer. After they reached the first height and as they descended toward the base of Mount Pisgah, Dr. Latimer found himself beside Josephine.

"Shall we let the others go up the hill and we take the wood road to-night?" he asked. They were the first words he had addressed directly to her since the evening before.

She did not turn to look at him, but she answered, "Yes."

So, at the foot of the hill, as the others left the road and passed unconsciously by the bird's nest beneath the fern, these two kept on and became lost to view among the trees.

"Why, Dr. Latimer and Josephine are n't coming with us," exclaimed Helen, looking back.

"I told you they had a secret," said Vernon in a low tone. Little cared she how many secrets they had, so that Olin was leading the way where she might follow.

"Josephine has never been down the wood road at this hour, I believe," returned Agnes hastily, her heart beating as though something momentous to herself were impending; beating faster than Josephine's own, for the latter felt no excitement. It seemed blessedly natural to her that Dr. Latimer should ask her to go with him and that she should go.

The fragrant firs sent incense toward the evening sky as they passed between them, and the hush was scarcely broken by the water of the cove as it lapped dreamily upon its rocky shore, shining with rosy gleams between the dark green of the thick clustering trees.

Dr. Latimer crossed his hands behind him. "I have been thinking of you all day, Josephine," he began with his usual deliberate decision of tone.

The words made the girl change color, but neither he nor she knew it, for he was looking gravely at the ground, and she was too earnest to be shy.

"You perplexed me last evening, and I did not dare to believe what it would open a new world to me to believe. You are young and I am very — very — old."

"Dr. Latimer."

"Yes, so much so that there is a gulf fixed be-

tween us. Josephine, the innocence, truth, and single-heartedness of your nature does not constitute all your charm to me. I should be at a loss to tell what it is that I find in you and in no other woman. I have kept away from you much of the time since your arrival, as you know. It was because I found that I did not feel toward you as toward your sisters, or toward any one else in the world. I had no intention of indulging this foreign sentiment. I had myself well in hand until you yourself confused me last night."

"Thank heaven for that," murmured Josephine, looking at him, her pure face aglow with inner light.

"Since then I have been bewildered, doubtful — happy. I could n't help being happy because of what I saw in your eyes this morning. They told me more than you told me last night, and tempted me unspeakably to beg you — I have seemed to move in a blissful trance to-day; yet I know I may be mistaken."

The rapturous, tremulous half-smile which Josephine bent upon the unresponsive roadway!

"Whether I am or not — whether or no your feeling for me could grow into love — I must tell you that I have loved before, deeply, intensely, — or, rather, not I, but a gay, happy young fellow, differing from me as far as one man can from another. The loss of that woman broke me, body and heart."

"She is dead?" asked Josephine with pale lips.

"She is dead, but were she living and if she loved me and I believed in her as I did in those far-off days, I could not love her now, so utterly changed am I from the man I was then."

"Then why should I care?" exclaimed Josephine, turning her dark, ardent glance upon him. "Why do we speak of her?"

Dr. Latimer regarded the candid face with yearning tenderness, half put out his arms to her and then dropped them.

"Josephine, are you not mistaken? You are only twenty-four. I was so young at twenty-four! Ought I to let you link your fresh life to mine?" His longing, his scruples, all lay open to the girl's loving intuition.

He had stood still, and she did likewise, looking up into the deep intensity of his eyes and holding her hands tightly clasped together.

"Do you remember the first evening I met you?" she asked. "That night when I had been calling at the Normans'? From the moment I entered our little room where you were, I have known, vaguely at first and then consciously, that I should only live and feel joy in living during the moments when I might be near you. If you feel very old, let me try to show you to yourself as you seem to me. I feel young, ignorant, selfish beyond measure by comparison with you, but — oh, if you love me!"

She stopped, joy and wonder too great for speech transfiguring her unsmiling face.

He took her hand in both his, gently, solemnly, and looked at her in silence for half a minute. It seemed to the girl as though a light streamed from his eyes into hers that warmed her from head to foot. At last he spoke: —

“This man who says now, ‘I love you, Josephine,’ has never felt love for another woman. I will pray that I may bless your life, my darling, as you have already blessed mine.”

He drew her to him, and as they kissed each other there in the cathedral of the lonely woods, thanksgiving from two fervent hearts sped heavenward with the incense of the pines.

The night was mild, and the same company who had made the excursion to Mount Pisgah were seated around the edge of the Sea Shell piazza, watching Jupiter’s fairy track of light across the water, when Josephine and Dr. Latimer returned.

“Always room for one more,” cried Vernon cheerfully, as she recognized them.

Josephine took the vacant place next Miss Charlotte without a word, and Dr. Latimer remained standing near her, both blissfully happy in that sense of possession which as yet no one suspected. Their engagement was not to be kept secret, however. They had decided upon that.

Through the window of the cottage Dr. Latimer could see Persis sitting beside the lamp-lighted table, reading the paper. A very little of the piazza by evening was sufficient for Miss Applebee.

The water trembling in the starlight was all very well ; but it could not offer attraction to compare with the declarations of the weather prophet, and the day-old news items from Boston.

The doctor went into the house and closed the door behind him. Persis, who had the broad "Journal" sheet outspread in both hands, moved it slightly to one side in order to see who came in and then went back to her reading.

Dr. Latimer seated himself in a chair opposite.

"Did you see what a windstorm they've had in Salem?" she asked, half-closing the paper to look at him. "Chimneys knocked down, glass smashed. Do you know, you've picked up wonderfully this summer. Just now as you're lookin' at me I should say you was years younger than when you come down here. See how well you get along if you give yourself half a chance. Now I wish you'd promise me"—

"Persis, I came in here to tell you something ; to tell you first of all, because you loved my mother and because you have been the faithfulest friend I ever had. Miss Josephine has promised to marry me."

The pages of the "Boston Journal" fell flabbily together, and the paper slowly collapsed under the table.

"Doctor!" ejaculated Persis, breathless with the effort to grasp the foreign idea.

The lamplight shone softly on the man's silvered

hair, and as he kept his smiling gaze on his old friend, the singular spiritual strength and beauty of his face impressed her with ideas for which she had no utterance.

"Paul!" she exclaimed, going back lovingly to the name of other days, her voice shaking with her blind emotion and wonder, "it's a new start for you, ain't it? I don't just sense it yet, but — God bless her."

"God bless her!" repeated Dr. Latimer slowly.

He rose and went out of doors again, and Persis had no idea how long she had stared at the chimney-piece when, through all her hopefulness and joyful excitement, her kind heart suggested that the girls, when they came in, would feel freer if they found her asleep. She fled upstairs with more celerity than she had used in years, and so it was that the living-room was empty when Josephine and her sisters entered.

"Don't you want some gingerbread, girls," asked Vernon, struggling with a yawn. She was starting for the familiar tin box when Josephine detained her.

"I have something to tell you, girls, before we go upstairs, and Dr. Latimer may come in."

"There now, it's coming," said Vernon with satisfaction. "I told Helen you had a secret."

They both regarded Josephine curiously as she stood before them with pale face and shining eyes that seemed to look far away.

"You will hardly believe it," she said wistfully,

"for I scarcely can myself. Why should it come to me, who am so insignificant?"

"Why, Josephine dear, what do you mean?" replied Helen, startled by her sister's manner and hushed tone.

Vernon grew pale to the lips. She believed that her worst fears were realized, and that Josephine had walked down the wood road to-night to tell Dr. Latimer and receive his sanction. She told herself that Olin's spirits had been unusually gay this evening, and that this was the reason. Every lightest word he had ever let fall regarding Josephine flamed now before her mental vision as convincing proof. She would be strong. She would die before she betrayed herself.

"She does n't frighten me," she said quietly. "I know your secret, Jo dear. Let me be the first to congratulate you."

She held out her hand and Josephine took it, turning the radiance of her luminous eyes upon Vernon.

"Congratulate," repeated Helen wildly. "What is it? Are you engaged, Josephine?" She grasped her sister's free hand.

"Think of the wonder of it," said Josephine, turning slowly to her. "In all the world full of women he loves me."

"And why should n't he!" exclaimed Helen hastily, her eyes growing misty. "What a happy man he ought to be," she added ardently; "and no doubt he is. Oh, Josephine," kissing her lov-

ingly, "to think that this is the outcome of all those innocent-appearing pastel sketches."

"Yes, and why you were afraid of cows," Vernon thought of adding, but decided to save her scant breath for such speeches as should be necessary.

Josephine regarded Helen dreamily, as one who in a happy reverie finds difficulty in realizing the occurrences taking place immediately around her.

"Pastel sketches?" she repeated vaguely.

"Oh, perhaps you and Mr. Randolph forgot all about the sketches when you were once off."

"Mr. Randolph?" What music to Vernon's ears was the faint scorn and wonder of Josephine's tone! "Did you think it was Mr. Randolph? Why, Helen, it is Dr. Latimer."

As though she had called him, Dr. Latimer opened the door and walked in.

The truth had been so far removed from the mind of either Helen or Vernon that the pen cannot do justice to the expression of their faces at this juncture.

Dr. Latimer, his noble height outlined against the closed door, regarded them questioningly. The sweet dignity and gravity of his face only changed to an unconscious smile when Vernon, throwing off the spell of her astonishment, rushed toward him with an impetuous movement and flung herself, sobbing, on his breast.

He put his arm around her and smoothed her hair. "What is it, Vernon, dear child?" he asked quietly.

"I'm so hap-hap-happy," she gasped chokingly.

"So am I," he answered, and a low laugh escaped him as his eyes sought Josephine. The girls had never before heard him laugh. "But let us not cry about it, Vernon," he added.

The youngest felt deeply conscious of double dealing when she regained her balance and met the grateful gaze of affection which Josephine bestowed upon her.

"What do you say, Helen?" asked the doctor. "You look forgiving."

"I say," returned the girl, "that the two noblest souls I have ever known have found each other." She pressed the doctor's hand, gazed expressively at him and at Josephine, then turned to the youngest. "Vernon, come upstairs."

When Dr. Latimer entered the house, he had just parted from Olin Randolph, with whom he had been escorting Mr. Bruch to his place of lodging, and while the above conversation was taking place a very sober-faced young man had entered the Nautilus and walked to the foot of the stairs.

"Gone to bed, Aunt Charlotte?"

"Sh! You'll wake Dickie. No, we have n't gone to bed," answered Miss Norman.

"Too far gone to come downstairs?"

"N—no, not if it's necessary."

"Then come down, both of you." Mr. Randolph flung himself into a chair, and with his hands stuffed into his pockets stared at the floor.

His aunts, after some little delay, appeared,

Miss Charlotte's curious face looking out from between locks of the drab front hair which she had just been combing preparatory to winding it on crimping pins. The younger sister was in a white wrapper and her long hair fell loosely over it.

"What is it?" they both asked together.

Their nephew looked up moodily. "Miss Iverson is engaged to Dr. Latimer," he said bluntly.

Miss Charlotte uttered a little shriek and clutched the table. "Which one?" she demanded.

"Josephine, of course."

"Well, Agnes Norman, I hope you're satisfied now," ejaculated the elder sister with sudden and awful solemnity.

Agnes might have been excused for astonishment at this irrelevant and undeserved attack, but she only looked straight before her with starry eyes and nodded gently.

"Yes, I am satisfied."

"The shameless creature!" exclaimed Miss Norman, reddening and striking the table in the fullness of her indignation. "The designing" —

"Charlotte!"

Agnes had darted forward and seized her sister by the wrist.

"Not one word against that beautiful young woman to whom we shall henceforth owe all honor and love and gratitude!"

Miss Norman quailed before the stern white face.

"There is nothing designing about her. She is as open and above-board as the day," said Randolph sullenly.

"Olin," Agnes released her sister and fell on her knees beside his chair, "you did n't care for her, dear? Tell me you did n't," she pleaded, studying him with anxious eyes.

"I admired her immensely. I had no idea of this," he answered, in a tone more indicative of irritation than a broken heart.

"But you will be reconciled to it, Olin, when you realize, when you think what it means to have him happy once more. You do not know what he suffered; you were too young. But Charlotte knows. Oh, Charlotte, how can you—how can my sister be capable of one thought now that is not all thankfulness to God?" She bowed her head on the arm of Olin's chair and sobbed unrestrainedly. The unprecedented sight electrified her companions.

Randolph lifted her kindly and put her in his own place, letting her head lie on his shoulder as he knelt beside her.

"Agnes, my dear Agnes," begged Miss Norman brokenly. "Do forgive me; pray do, dear, and don't cry so. I did n't have time to think it all out. I won't distress you again. Oh, do, Olin, persuade her to stop. She will make herself ill. I dare say Josephine never thought of the doctor's money or position."

"I dare swear she did n't," added Randolph

warmly. "She is worthy of him, and everybody knows Dr. Latimer is worthy of any woman. There is nothing to cry about, Aunt Agnes."

The weeping woman slid her hand around her nephew's muscular neck, as he had many a time clung to her for comfort in times past, and her emotion being an unheard-of ebullition, he soothed her very tenderly until she was once more self-controlled.

But Miss Charlotte Norman had received a lesson which lasted her all her life.

CHAPTER XIX.

PEBBLY BEACH.

THE next day dawned clear again. "It's a wonder how this weather holds," said Persis to herself, as she regulated the height of a window-shade in the parlor and looked out upon the ocean that morning. Majestic green billows were rolling in from the sea with a force which caused the fine spray to rise like smoke from along the line of each crest as they advanced.

"But Nature ought to rejoice to-day if ever," she added with a smile, as she returned to her kitchen and the breakfast dishes.

A shadow fell across the grass and Olin appeared outside the window next the sink. He leaned his arms on the sill.

"Who is at home?" he asked.

"The old lady," responded Persis, pouring a dipperful of water into her pan.

"Where are your faithful helpers you talk so much about?"

"It was Miss Josephine's turn this mornin' — Miss Applebee's gratified smile again overspread her countenance — "and says I to her: 'Thou shalt not wash dishes nor yet feed the swine.'"

"But sit on a cushion" — suggested Randolph.

Persis nodded. "Exactly. A cushion in the doctor's boat. That's where she is now. Well, what do you think of our engagement?" The housekeeper's satisfaction seemed to radiate about her.

"Why, it took our breath away over at the Nautilus. I did n't suppose the doctor was a marrying man. I suppose you were prepared for it."

Persis cleared her throat. She was reluctant to admit how the news had amazed her. "I hain't been so tickled over anythin' since that wretched woman died," she replied.

"What? Oh, yes."

"That was five years ago, and I was just about as happy then as I am now. May I be forgiven if 't was a sin. I dunno but what after all Miss Josephine's my favorite o' the girls," continued Persis. "Last night, I guess about midnight, I made some sound that let her know I was awake and she come to my bedside and says she: 'Persis?' 'What?' says I. Then she put that pretty hand o' hers on mine and says she, 'Are you willin' I should have him?' says she, very softly. 'Bless your heart,' says I, 'it's the best thing that ever happened to him in all his life;' and says she: 'Thank you, Persis. I should have been so sorry if you did n't like it.' Then she went back to bed." Miss Applebee winked several times before she looked up again at Olin. "They're all nice," she added, fixing him with a piercing glance, "and

they've narrowed down to two. I can tell you, Olin Randolph, them girls'll go off, now they've started, like hot cakes."

"They seem to have gone off like something this morning," returned Olin smiling, "and I suppose Bruch is with them. He has vanished."

"Yes; he and Miss Helen went in the boat, too. Vernon's gone to Pebbly Beach. She's got a new scheme that she's all taken up with."

So Olin, restlessly unfit for his own society, stepped over the slight railing at the edge of the cliff, and plunging down its steep face to the rough shore, walked northward over heavy boulders, which gradually decreased in size until on Pebbly Beach he found himself treading upon myriad fairy stones of the delicate sea colors.

He descried Vernon and Dickie from afar, their heads together over a basket lying near them. The inflowing and retreating waves played so roughly with the pebbles that their clashing, as they rolled over one another, shut out the sound of Olin's footsteps, and the first warning Vernon had of his approach was the inarticulate screech on high C with which the small boy rejoices to hail his friends.

"My! You scared me, Dickie," she said with a start. "Oh, good-morning, Mr. Randolph. I did n't know you ever came to Pebbly. Are you going to stay, or are you going up-along?" She looked at him brightly.

"I'll stay if you will let me."

"Of course I will. We'd like another helper, would n't we, Dickie? You will have to work, though, like everything."

"Yes, *sir*; 't is n't very easy," declared the child, shaking his head importantly.

"What is the scheme?" asked Olin, in a tone which did not promise energetic coöperation.

"We've got to get the prettiest pebbles and just the right size," explained Dickie impressively, "and when we get home we'll fill little bottles with 'em and cover 'em with alka — alka" —

"Alcohol," said Vernon.

"Yes; it makes 'em as bright, and then we are going to give 'em to the children in the hospitals to play with."

"Not a bad idea. Whose is it?"

"Why, Dr. Latimer was talking to us about the hospitals the other day," explained Vernon, "and he was so interesting I felt as though I could n't wait to do something; and it just came into my head that perhaps I could take some of the dear island to them this way, — bottles of pebbles for the children and little fir-balsam pillows for the older ones."

"Good scheme," vouchsafed Randolph, sitting down and beginning to toss little stones into the basket.

"Here, here!" exclaimed Vernon. "You must be very careful. We only take the very best."

"Yes, and we *may* take the very best," said Dickie eagerly. "Go on, Miss Vernon. You had

only got as far as 'Once there was a great giant.'" Such anticipatory relish as Dickie threw into these words!

The girl looked her reluctance and hesitated as she picked over the stones in her hand.

"If you don't I'll peg at you," announced Dickie, scientifically drawing back his right hand, which held a pebble.

The girl lifted her big blue eyes to his mischievous ones. "Sir Galahad would n't speak that way," she said quietly.

To Olin's astonishment this argument appeared to have weight. Dickie shied the pebble at a strip of dried kelp stranded above them. "Well, go on; won't you, please?"

"Once there was a great giant," began Vernon, "and his name was Atlantic Ocean. He was very beautiful and powerful and generous."

"Was n't he ever bad?" asked Dickie, who preferred his giants spiced with original sin.

"Yes, sometimes he lost control of himself entirely, and went into fits of temper, roaring and lashing about so terribly that I could not tell you in a day all the harm he did at such times; but when he was in his right mind he made everybody happy, as all good people do. He was very, very rich. All the pearls in the world were once gifts from him. No one could count his jewel caskets, and many of them he left uncovered all the time. He was not only willing everybody should help himself, but he was nearly always busy polishing

the jewels to make them more beautiful. Think how tiresome we should consider it to rub a precious stone for half an hour. Well, Atlantic Ocean has polished his jewels for hundreds of years, and he allows us to come to this lovely display and take the very best, — there is no fear of offending him, — and those we leave he will continue patiently to polish, and offer them to the next comers."

"Hi! See that," cried Dickie, handing Vernon a translucent little stone of pale green.

"Pretty enough to set in gold," said Vernon admiringly. "Here, Mr. Randolph," passing the pebble to him. "Drop it into the basket, please, but look at it first for an object lesson. That is the sort of pebble you are expected to find in large quantities and assorted colors."

Mr. Randolph examined the stone, then, deliberately robbing its possible owner, dropped it unnoticed into his own pocket, and to compensate for the larceny began to search in earnest for further worthy candidates for the basket.

"Yes," said Vernon, graciously nodding approval of several which he displayed to her, "those that have the shape and look of sugared almonds can all go in. It is an everlasting sort of confectionery that won't hurt the little chicks."

As the sun grew hotter she found her lieutenants less inclined to subject their candidates to strict examination, but Vernon turned a deaf ear to all appeals to lower the standard. Taking the

basket in her lap for safety and discovering it to be suspiciously heavy, she burrowed among the pebbles and drew forth a common gray stone as big as her two fists.

"What does this mean?" she asked, turning an accusing gaze upon Olin, who looked at her blandly. "You wanted to fill up the basket!"

"You wrong me. Don't you observe the peculiar excrescence on the end of that stone? It is perfectly evident that it needs surgical attention, and it will never have such another chance to go to a hospital."

"You won't put another stone in that I don't see."

"Certainly not. Here is one. It is common enough in color, you will say, but observe that white star in the centre."

"Drop it! No, no; not in the basket," throwing it out energetically.

Mr. Randolph sighed patiently. "Well, here; how is this? Princeton colors. Polished till you can see your face in it."

"Dickie, do you think that is pretty?" asked Vernon holding the pebble between thumb and forefinger doubtfully.

"Yep."

"Yes, Miss Vernon," corrected the girl mechanically, still considering the pebble. "A child can tell what children would like better than we can."

"Oh, if that's all, I was young once myself," returned Olin cheerfully. "Now, here is one; see

that queer ring around it. I would have walked miles to find that when I was Dickie's age. Whew! is n't it hot under the lee of this hill?" He caught off his hat and fanned himself. "Dickie, will you have the goodness to take that clam-shell and fill it with water and come and baste me? I'm entirely done on one side."

"No," said Vernon firmly, discarding his offering "that won't do at all. Now, Mr. Randolph, you must take more pains," she continued authoritatively. "You offered your services of your own accord, and now you must accomplish something."

"I wish I had some ginger ale," remarked Dickie, wiping his flushed forehead with his little flannel sleeve."

"I'll tell you," said Olin with inspiration. "Let us go back now and get cool and come out and search for pebbles by moonlight."

"Hurry, hurry," returned Vernon unmoved. "Find me a dozen perfect beauties and you shall go. Think, Dickie, of the little children who would believe themselves in heaven if they could only be where we are. They have to trust us to do their selecting for them. It is a matter of honor, you see."

With a deep sigh Randolph began to pull over the little stones. It was seldom he offered one, extol it as he might, that Vernon did not hesitate over it critically; but after considerable haggling and wrangling, interspersed with despairing requests from Olin for "a yew-shaded tomb," the

exacting maiden consented to depart with her spoils, and on the way home expatiated on their beauties with all a collector's enthusiasm.

"And this is what you call sweet charity," said Olin.

"Yes, and when I am ready to get the fir for the pillows, perhaps I'll let you help me, too."

She glanced at him gayly as the three moved along the rough shore.

Randolph looked hunted.

"I think I'll go sword-fishing with down-along Martin. He leaves to-morrow to be gone two weeks. That will about use up the rest of my vacation."

As they ascended the cliff to the cool, delicious temperature of the upper air, they saw Mr. Bruch coming through Maiden Lane, his face exceedingly white under the fresh, new outing-cap he wore.

"Home from your sail?" said Olin.

"My dear sir, I was so sick as I could be!" exclaimed the professor. "I have suffered—ach!" rolling his eyes heavenward, "how I have suffered!"

"Oh, that will all pass off in a short time," returned Randolph, with that robust confidence always displayed by persons to whom the ups and downs of old ocean have never brought aught but exhilaration. "You must get over that, for sailing is half the life down here."

"I do not go in a boat again. Realla, no," replied the professor, "you must excuse me."

"Of course you shan't if you don't want to," said Vernon comfortingly. "Where is Helen?" She rather hoped her sister was also suffering. She had scolded her for accepting the doctor's invitation this morning. "I trust she did not stay with them," she added, with virtuous indignation.

"No, she landed, too, but she has gone to a house to sing with some children."

"Oh, yes. That's Helen," observed Vernon, turning to Olin. "I don't believe there's a child on this island that she does n't know; and now she is teaching them songs as though that was n't her work all the year."

"She is an angel, that girl," remarked the professor with simplicity.

"They're all a little cranky, the Iverson family," said Olin. "Here is this member breaking down the health of her friends in order to provide amusement for people already in the hospital. There's no balance to a mind like that."

"Just look at my pebbles, Mr. Bruch," Vernon was beginning, with enthusiasm, when Persis appeared at the door of the Sea Shell, pulling down her calico sleeves.

"Anythin' the matter with Mr. Brook?" she inquired vaguely, always being under the impression that the German could not clearly understand English.

"Yes, it is very rough this morning," answered Vernon.

"I thought he looked as white as a cloth when

he come up through the field. Don't you know any better than to keep him standin' there in the sun? Mr. Brook," raising her voice loudly, after the usual manner of addressing a foreigner, "don't you want to come in and lay down on the doctor's sofa?"

The professor raised his cap politely. "I am afraid I inconvenience you, madam. I can go right" —

"Not one bit. You come right along," returned Miss Applebee in a hospitable roar. "I'll make you comfortable in one minute."

If there was anything in which the heart of Persis delighted it was to make a fellow-being comfortable, and no one knew better than she how to do it. Presently Mr. Bruch found himself lying at length beside a shady window which commanded a long view of shore, his head on soft pillows and a light summer shawl spread over him; but before Persis went into the house she had flung a bit of consolation at her rebuked young people. If she chastened with one hand she usually comforted with the other.

"I've just baked gingerbread," she remarked sententiously.

"In that case," returned Olin, "the Sea Shell piazza is good enough for me," and he advanced and sat down expectantly in its shade. Dickie tumbled tumultuously into the hammock. Hammocks were chronic on the cottage piazzas.

"Why did n't you offer that to Miss Vernon?"

asked his cousin severely. "What do you suppose Sir Galahad would do in a case like that?"

"I guess Sir Galahad would have lied in a hammock if he'd had one," returned Dickie, preferring discussion to renunciation of the extremely comfortable position he had fallen upon.

"I can't contradict you. It has always seemed to me he utilized any situation in which he found himself, for that purpose."

Randolph looked at Vernon as he murmured his rejoinder. She flashed a threatening glance at him.

"Be careful, if you want me ever to speak to you again. A nice teacher you are!"

"You mistake. Architect — of my own fortunes. Getting along very slowly."

"Well, you must n't contaminate that child. He belongs to *us*. I am partly responsible for him."

"Yes, he belongs to us," repeated Olin, with exasperating calm. "It is very pleasant to me, I assure you, to have such a partner of my joys and sorrows as you."

Vernon blushed so furiously beneath this chaffing that Olin for very surprise looked away.

"Where is that gingerbread?" he called, leaning back, one knee in his embrace, until he could peer in through the screen door.

"Beggars should n't be choosers," retorted Persis from within. "You never did have any gratitude, Olin Randolph. Here I am gettin' you ginger ale, and you hurryin' of me up."

At this the young man had the grace to spring to his feet, and, hastening into the house, to relieve Persis of her little tray of glasses and the heaping plate of delicate, delicious, hot gingerbread, which to taste was worth a journey from Portland, had the island possessed no other charm.

Poor Mr. Bruch could not be tempted to partake, but the lunch was fully appreciated on the piazza.

"I believe," observed Vernon, between two bites, gazing reflectively at the square of ground behind the Nautilus, "I believe I should like to play a game of croquet."

Mr. Randolph looked startled. "With Dickie; yes, I would. Dickie plays very well. I don't believe Sir Gal—"

"No, I'll play with you."

"Great Scott! Let me go back to Pebbly Beach. I'll promise to find nothing but agates and beryls. No, I'll tell you, Miss Vernon, it is a great shame you don't know tennis. Let me teach you, and if you like it perhaps I shall not have to go sword-fishing."

So when Helen returned, she found these two bounding about on opposite sides of a net and Dickie asleep in the hammock. It surprised her to walk into the Sea Shell and there find Mr. Bruch extended at ease.

He hastened to rise at sight of her.

"Please don't," she said, with a gesture which sent him back again. "I am glad to see you so comfortable."

"Yes, Mrs. Persis has been most kind," he answered gratefully. "She has given me a brandy made of cherries that was beautiful. I am sorry to make trouble on my first day, but I make no more. I suppose one must sail once, but now it is behind me."

A determination to keep the experience behind him and to profit by it shone from the German's spectacles. "I do not lie down in your presence, Miss Helen," added the polite man as the girl seated herself in a neighboring rocking-chair, and he raised himself with celerity.

"It is unkind of you to send me upstairs," she returned.

"But I am well, entirely well," he returned anxiously. "Do not leave me."

So Helen permitted him to sit in his corner and told him about the shy children she had been teaching, while Persis, the other side of the open door, chopped the clams for dinner.

Presently Miss Charlotte Norman put her head in. "I have come to see who has run away with my guest," she said, with uncommon jocoseness. "Sister Agnes is nursing a headache to-day, so I am full of business at home."

"That's all right," called Persis. "I was the good Samaritan that took him in."

"Thank you, Miss Norman," said Mr. Bruch, springing promptly to his feet. "I was very dizzy from sailing" —

"Oh, that's it? All right," and Miss Charlotte, with a smiling nod, popped out again.

Presently Vernon and Olin came in, and the latter was recounting the chapter of her failures and successes to the running accompaniment of the girl's protests, when Dr. Latimer and Josephine appeared, the latter rosy and disheveled from the embraces of the rough, audacious wind.

"I am afraid you will never come with us again, Mr. Bruch," she said, her dark eyes dancing with life and happiness.

"Never," responded the German with unction. "I will die for you, Miss Josephine, yes, with pleasure; but not live on those waves in a little boat, no."

Everybody laughed, and Mr. Bruch looked from one to the other of the newly engaged couple with evident gratification. He classed the friendly young drawing-teacher as one of his benefactors, and that she should have joined her life to that of his most influential friend seemed to him both poetry and justice.

"Yet it was glorious," answered Josephine. "I am sorry you could not enjoy it, too."

Dr. Latimer was watching her; and Olin, as he saw the light in the face of the long-lonely man, no longer grudged him the gift which had come to him in Casco Bay.

"Sweet Casco Bay!
Where life is joy, and love at play
'Midst summer isles of Casco Bay."

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE PORTLAND DOCK.

It was consistent with Miss Charlotte Norman's inflexible narrowness of nature that she should not have realized that her nephew might look upon the Ivisons with sentiments differing from the patronizing friendliness which had in her own mind supplanted her old inimical feelings. Olin's behavior as he announced Dr. Latimer's engagement opened her eyes to the precipice whose edge he had been skirting, and yet, now that Josephine was entirely out of his reach, she did not seem so obnoxious a *partie* after all.

The future Mrs. Latimer was a person of consequence already. Miss Charlotte knew in detail what the happy girl was carelessly ignorant of; knew that there were rare gems buried long years in an iron vault, along with family plate whose richness would now all be at her command; knew that, more valuable still, a social position awaited her which Miss Norman felt Josephine's beauty would grace.

It was not in the possibilities of Miss Charlotte's nature that she should curry favor from mean motives. At the same time it was impossi-

ble that her valuation of Miss Ivison should not undergo a change owing to this astounding move on Dr. Latimer's part. Moreover, no one could be so prejudiced as not to perceive that it was love and not gratified ambition which made the world go round for Josephine in these days. She seemed to saturate everything and everybody about her with an effervescence from the depths of her happiness, while as for her lover, though silent or deliberate of speech as ever, one had but to look to see vitality returning to him day by day, restoring to him the youth and strength of which he had been so hardly defrauded.

"You never take your pastels with you any more," said Vernon to Josephine as the latter was starting off for a walk one morning.

"No use," returned the girl, with her sudden, brilliant smile, and although Olin and Dr. Latimer were standing by she added, "I should need a pencil dipped in sunlight to sketch the island as it looks to me now."

Vernon and Olin gazed after them as they moved away, the doctor carrying a book.

"She is n't ashamed of it," observed the latter.

"No, indeed. She is proud. Oh, I think it is perfectly beautiful!" exclaimed Vernon wistfully.

"It is, just that. If the hardest of the Ivison hearts is capable of such complete capitulation, what will the others be when their turn comes?"

"That is a very impertinent bit of speculation."

Olin regarded the rosy face through half-closed lids.

"You ought to know by this time that I am incapable of impertinence. But I have an inquiring mind. When Helen's time comes, and yours, may I be there to see!"

Vernon thought it highly improbable that her time would ever come if he were not there to see, and that being the case, her reply had in it the amount of candor to be expected.

"You would have to produce a few more men like Dr. Latimer."

"Oho! Miss Josephine has set a copy, has she?"

"Yes; and I fancy you would n't find that an easy task. He must have silvery hair that waves off the forehead just like Dr. Latimer's."

"My hair was white about eighteen years ago. Would n't that count for something? Aunt Agnes used to call me the silver-haired prince, after some fairy hero of hers."

"You are a very flippant young man," rejoined Vernon, with a superior air.

This talk had taken place outside the Sea Shell, and here Persis, who had overheard it, came to the window. "You're goin' to Portland at eleven, ain't you, Olin?"

"Yes, madam."

At home in Boston Miss Applebee was scrupulous to give the young man his dignified title on the very rare occasions when their paths crossed,

but down here she used the name under which she had scolded or petted him through his boyhood.

"Well, Vernon, is there any reason why you can't get on another dress and go 'long? I'd give a good deal to get the rest o' them worsteds to-day, and, land o' liberty, I'd just as soon trust Puggy to match 'em as Olin!"

The latter raised his cap and made a ceremonious bow.

"I suppose I can go," returned the girl slowly.

"All right. You bring home some blueberries, Olin, and I'll make you as good a pie as ever you set your eyes on."

"Not a juicy one!" exclaimed the young man, expressing sudden dramatic emotion.

"You see," returned Persis, with Delphic vagueness. She muttered defiantly to some unseen accuser as she entered the doctor's room and began making the bed: "I ain't any match-maker, but, law sakes! when two folks are just made for each other and hain't got sense enough to know it, I *will* get behind once in a while and give 'em a push."

The two young people, unaware of any scheming for their benefit, nevertheless enjoyed the result. The Merriconeag worked her busy way from Harpswell Neck past the mysteries of pretty, uninhabited shores, about each one of which Olin had a tale to tell of his boyish explorations; then the boat began touching at the well-known islands

more and more thickly settled as they neared the city, with summer homes and hotels.

"The sight of these places makes me exult in Maiden Lane," said Vernon.

"It is a good thing to be satisfied," replied her companion with a smile.

"These poor people seem fairly shut in, by comparison."

Olin's smile broadened as he viewed the expanse of dancing blue water about them.

"Our island is like a beautiful secret," continued Vernon, "and I love secrets that I'm in myself."

She looked so pretty and innocent as she raised her eyes to Randolph's that Miss Applebee would have been elated with the effect she produced upon the rather cold and critical young man.

The little steamer at last felt its way up to its own pier in the populous harbor full of all sorts and conditions of craft.

As Vernon and Olin were leaving the boat a woman who had been carefully scrutinizing the face of each passenger who crossed the plank started at sight of the young man and gazed at him so steadily that his eyes met her. He saw a tall figure dressed shabbily, in no way remarkable except for the strange, hungry gaze with which she followed his every movement, even persisting after she knew herself observed.

"Crazy," thought Olin, with a passing sensation of pity; then turned to his companion and would

have forgotten the stranger but that she hurried after him and he heard her voice at his elbow.

"Pardon me. Is n't your name Randolph?"

"It is." Olin's hand went mechanically to his hat and Vernon's sunny face looked to see who had spoken to him. The hard lines in the woman's face, the yellowish tinge of her eyeballs, and the careless disorder of her hair and dress were repellent.

"Do you know me?" she continued, looking at him with an odd smile.

"No," rejoined Randolph, curtly, and was moving on.

The smile went out of the woman's face. "Wait," she said, imperiously. "I wish to know where Dr. Latimer is at present; you can tell me."

Randolph paused an instant before answering:

"He is taking his vacation and cannot be disturbed."

The woman's brow contracted.

"I know he is on one of the islands in this bay. I learned so much in Boston. I must see him. I need not tell you that I am poor. Please do not give me needless trouble in finding him. You know him, my dear, I see it in your eyes," she added suddenly, addressing Vernon.

Randolph, taking one step forward, interposed his broad shoulder between them. There were signs in the stranger's face which made such familiarity toward Vernon intolerable to him. "Go into the waiting-room, please," he said to the girl,

and she obeyed, with some reluctance, born of a dread lest Olin should not be kind enough to this poor creature.

"Dr. Latimer is very much fatigued by the exacting work in which he engages nearly all the year. His friends are trying to make him rest," said Randolph then.

"I must and will see him," returned the woman doggedly, and yet with a certain refinement of pronunciation and manner which had impressed Olin from the first.

"Would not sending a message by me do? Or you might write to him."

The woman gave him a sullen look. "Well," she said, "I have a sick child with me in this city. Give me a dollar to get medicine now, and Dr. Latimer's address, and I will write to him later."

Randolph reflected. He knew that if he consented he would be giving what Emerson styles "a wicked dollar." He disbelieved in the sick child, and strongly suspected that the money was wanted for some stimulant, the use of which had branded its victim with its marks; but by bestowing the money he would certainly be buying a short respite and possibly total immunity for his friend. This whole talk might have been for the sole purpose of obtaining the dollar which, without further hesitation, he put into the woman's hand, and then started to move on as though ending the interview.

"The address! Pray give it to me," she begged.

excitedly. "You do not know what you do in refusing."

He turned back with a frown. "Send a letter to Dr. Latimer at Orr's Island, care of Mr. Amos Johnson, and he will get it," he answered briefly. The reply was truthful, but the doctor's island was "a beautiful secret" still.

The stranger's eyes glistened with satisfaction. She had received money to satisfy her immediate craving, and she knew where to find Dr. Latimer when she wanted him.

Hastening through the waiting-room ahead of her benefactor, she disappeared into the street beyond.

"Were you kind to her?" asked Vernon doubtfully, as Olin approached.

"I don't know. I did the best I could on the spur of the moment."

"How strange she looked," said the girl, "and how could she know your name?"

"Probably she is one of the doctor's flock of black sheep, and has seen me with him somewhere. I wish, with Persis, that they would let him alone a little while in the year."

Dismissing the stranger from their minds, the two started out to do their errands in the quiet, shaded, attractive streets, where even the car-drivers have not become pessimistic, and the conductors are courteous gentlemen.

No one who has not striven in the babel-like shops of our large cities, and endured their scant

courtesy, can appreciate the soothing effects of making a purchase in Portland. Two commodities the clerks there have in bewildering abundance, — namely, time and temper. Apparently they do not consider that either may ever be lost. There is evidence of prosperity, but customers move leisurely about, and the pleasant young woman behind the counter takes the trouble to invite your waiting friend, in a home-like manner, to “have a chair.”

On the counters of dry-goods shops stand vases of sweet-peas and nasturtiums. There is no confusion, no noise. It is ideal shopping.

Olin and Vernon, yielding pleasantly to the leisurely current, did not finish their list of errands and their early supper until it was time to catch the six o'clock boat. They were moving down the street toward the dock, laden as to arms and light as to hearts, when, at sight of a fruit-stand, Vernon uttered an exclamation and stood still.

“We have forgotten the blueberries.”

“Berries, miss?” asked a man, coming out from the store to which the stand was attached.

“We ought to take them, but we haven't a hand,” said Vernon, looking up at Olin with perplexity.

“How many, miss?” asked the salesman.

“Well, two quarts,” hesitated Vernon. “I don't see how we can carry them.”

“‘Always room for one more’ may hold good

in this case," remarked her companion resignedly, taking a silver coin from his vest pocket with two disengaged fingers. He wondered what certain of his Boston acquaintances would think could they see his wealth of bundles.

Vernon began to laugh. Skies were dark, indeed, when Vernon could not see the ludicrous side of circumstances, and she was at that age when a laugh is in itself an enjoyment. The good-natured shopman put the finishing touch to the situation when he briskly twisted the top of the paper bag into which he had poured the berries.

"Here, ketch it right by the snout, now," he said cheerfully to Olin, who closed a finger about the sympathetically offered handle and moved off beside Vernon, whose feelings were bubbling over helplessly.

Olin had not forgotten the discordant experience of the morning, and when he reached the waiting-room he looked about with some apprehension for the persistent stranger. Not until the Chebeague was puffing her way out into the harbor and he had scanned every passenger aboard did he accept the pleasant certainty that the black-eyed woman had not determined upon dogging their movements to carry out her purpose.

"I wouldn't speak to the doctor of our encounter this morning," he said, then, to Vernon.

"Oh, of that woman who wanted him?"

"Yes. I gave her his address. That is enough.

If he knew about her there is no telling what he might feel called upon to do. We will keep intruders out of his paradise as long as we can."

Meanwhile, Helen, coming home early from a walk to set the table for dinner on the same day, found that her sister had gone to Portland to do some necessary errands for Persis.

"Would n't it be an idea to have a lobster supper for them when they get home to-night?" she suggested.

"Why, yes. I'd just as lieves to as not," replied Persis.

"Mr. Bruch thinks lobsters are 'beautiful,'" laughed Helen.

"Well, let's give him all he can eat, then," said Miss Applebee good-naturedly; "that is, if we can get 'em. Cap'n Gregg's the most likely man to have 'em, but we'll have to get the doctor to ask him, or like as not he'll say we can't have 'em on short notice. He's that cross-grained. Cap'n Gregg and me's pretty good friends in his way. Once—I shall never forget—I come down from Portland in a pourin' rain, and when I got to the dock Cap'n Amos and Dave wan't there. I would n't a-cared only I was just loaded down with bundles. Cap'n Gregg happened along and see the fix I was in. 'Lay down them things in the shed,' says he, gruff as a bear, 'and go 'long. I'll be up with 'em in a little while.' I thanked him, and put 'em down, and started, but before I'd got far I thought, thinkses I, 'I

might just as well take one or two o' them things,' and I turned back. He glared at me, and I says, 'shan't I take' — but he pointed his finger up the hill and says he, '*Go home!*' He just bellered it, as if I was a dog. I laughed all the way home. That's Cap'n Gregg when he's got on his comp'ny manners. And swear! There ain't such another swearer on the island. He's cooled down on that some since he's known Dr. Latimer. We'll see if the doctor'll go up there for us."

It proved that the doctor would, and as Josephine wished to accompany him the two set forth soon after dinner.

"Captain Gregg is rather a rough customer," he said, as they walked along. "I cannot promise you a gracious reception. He thinks women are a mistake."

"How interesting it would be to convert him!" returned the girl.

"I am afraid even you could not do that, my Josephine."

"Then I will be content simply to be entertained by him."

"That you will be in a fashion. There he is now."

Josephine looked and saw a rough, grizzled old man standing bareheaded outside a cottage door. He lowered his shaggy eyebrows as the visitors approached, and to Dr. Latimer's greeting returned a surly grunt.

"I'm looking for lobsters, captain," announced the doctor.

"Who's that woman?" asked the old man curtly, fixing disapproving eyes on Josephine.

"Miss Ivison. And this is Captain Gregg, Miss Ivison."

"Tell her she can go in and set down," growled the host, contemptuously disregarding the little bow which Josephine ventured to send in his direction.

"I think we won't wait to-day, thank you. Can we get" —

"Why did n't ye tell me yesterday 'f ye wanted lawbsters?"

"We did n't know it. We have a German friend with us who considers our shellfish a great luxury. We thought we would give a lobster supper at the cottage to-night."

"How many did ye want?"

"About a dozen."

Captain Gregg started to say something, but swallowed the words with a herculean effort which bore witness to their size and heat. Dr. Latimer, well knowing their appalling nature, was not surprised at the extra acerbity thrown into the host's next sentence.

"Well, twelve lawbsters ain't goin' to walk out o' the sea at the biddin' of any Dutchman. He'll have to wait, I guess."

"Then you haven't them. Very well. I may find them somewhere on the island. Good" —

"Hold awn a minute. I'll go in and see how many I have got. She stayin' at your place?" jerking his thumb toward Josephine.

"Yes. This lady is going to be my wife, captain."

"The dev" — Another laborious swallow engulfed the remainder of the ejaculation, and even Captain Gregg's surly scowl cleared away as he looked into Dr. Latimer's eyes. Then he turned with a stare of grudging curiosity toward Josephine, who smiled involuntarily.

"Won't you wish me joy?" she said, to break the silence.

"Wish ye joy? Ye 're goin' to marry him, and yit, as if that wan't enough, ye want me to wish ye joy!" he returned fiercely. "I never saw a woman 't was sat'sfied yit. Ye can't sat'sfy 'em."

After this interview it was more to Josephine's surprise than the doctor's that the old man produced eleven lobsters, eight of them aggressively alive, and three of them a vivid red.

"I did n't cal'late to boil to-day, but it jest happened so; ye can take 'em all along."

"But I don't want to rob you of your supper," protested Dr. Latimer. "I can" —

"Take 'em, I say," interrupted the other, roughly.

Many hands make light work, and soon after eight o'clock, when Vernon and Olin entered the cottage, the lobsters had been boiled, shelled, and the tough parts of them chopped. The table was

ornamented with large platters of the meat, garnished around the edges with red claws, and several plates of thin bread and butter peeped from snowy, enfolding napkins.

The two families were assembled and waiting.

"We did n't think you 'd ever come," exclaimed Dickie, as the wayfarers presented themselves.

"Why did we eat anything in Portland?" demanded Vernon tragically, of her companion, after one look at the appetizing spread embellished by the steaming pots of tea and coffee which Persis now brought in from the kitchen.

"If you knew what Dr. Latimer and I went through to get this for you," said Josephine, as they all seated themselves.

"Josephine went with me to Captain Gregg's," explained Dr. Latimer.

"Oh, then Miss Josephine has met the island Chesterfield," said Olin.

"Yes; he was in one of his most amiable moods to-day, fortunately."

"He was!" exclaimed the girl; "then that decides me. I shall not visit him again. Are you sure you paid him right, doctor? Twenty-five cents for eleven lobsters?"

Dr. Latimer smiled. "That is the market price. It would have been impossible to induce him to accept more."

"Indeed, if the doctor had offered him more," remarked Olin, "it is highly probable the captain would have forgotten his Turveydrop deportment.

How do you like the lobster, Bruch? This dressing Persis makes is fine, is n't it?"

"It is a dream!" pronounced the German, with devout enthusiasm.

"A dream now," said Agnes. "Perchance in the small hours a nightmare."

She spoke gayly. For her, in this company, any feast would have been ambrosial. The moon, sailing high in heaven, looked down on myriad homes to-night, but upon none where happier souls were gathered than those now clustering in shadowless content about the Sea Shell table.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CABLE MESSAGE.

DR. LATIMER having declared himself obliged to take another trip to Boston, Persis looked to Josephine to prevent it, but the arguments he brought forward, whatever they were, proved silencing to the objections of his fiancée, and the doctor departed by the six o'clock boat on the following morning.

Josephine made Persis lie in bed, and herself went down and made his cup of coffee and walked with him to the landing through the thrilling radiance of that early sunshine.

She laughed at herself as she returned, for the loneliness and emptiness that seemed to have settled upon the landscape, and her heart went out after the beloved form which each moment was bearing farther from her.

"I must not be so selfish. I must try to change and become more like him," she thought humbly, "or I shall never be worthy to share his life."

"Is Isola Bella a desert isle, my dear?" laughed Agnes, when, later in the morning, they met. "You look as though you were abiding by

an iron resolution to be cheerful. I believe the doctor is to be gone two days, is n't he?"

"Not any longer than that," admitted Josephine, laughing, too, and coloring rather shamefacedly.

"Well, I am going to make the most of his absence," said Miss Norman. "Let us take the kodak and get some fresh views. Vernon has persuaded me into adding my consent to yours that she should sail over to Ragged Island with Olin and Dickie; Helen is going to sing with her improvised kindergarten, and we will take Mr. Bruch with us."

This programme was carried out, and it was about half past eleven when Persis, standing arms akimbo on the piazza watching a number of porgie boats which were pursuing a course unusually near the shore, saw Helen come sauntering around the corner of the house, a letter in her hand.

"See there," said Miss Applebee, nodding her head toward the unpicturesque fleet. "How plain you can see the man up there in the front riggin', watchin' for fish."

The girl came and stood beside her, and they gazed for a while at the boat's manœuvres.

"What you got there?" asked Persis at last.

"Well, I will say, this island has n't lost all its primitiveness yet," returned the girl. "I met the eleven o'clock boat, knowing you were looking for an express package, and after they had loaded and unloaded their freight, human and otherwise, some one on the boat shouted:—

"Anybody here to take a telegram to Dr. Latimer?" I did n't answer at once, and the steamer was actually pulling away before I gathered wits enough to call out that I would, and then this was flung ashore. Now, supposing there had been nobody there to take it."

"Why, 't would have gone back to Portland, prob'bly," replied Persis calmly. "The steam-boat company ain't paid to bring telegrams. They just do it to accommodate. I wonder what 't is."

"It seems to be a repeated cable message," said Helen, regarding the envelope. "That was what made the method of delivery so striking. To think that some one was at the expense of cabling to the doctor from Europe, and then that he might not have received it!"

"Oh, he'd a-got it all right in the end, but there might a-been some delay." Miss Applebee took the envelope as Helen offered it. "Once on a time, Miss Helen," she said impressively, "Dr. Latimer, that great and good man, had an enemy, and if 't wan't that she's dead as a door-nail it would give me the shakes all over to hold this bit o' paper in my hand, 'cause of late years she lived in Europe. She come from there in the first place, and that's reason enough why the land o' the free and the home o' the brave's good enough for me, and always will be to my dyin' day. As 't is, I guess I better open this, 'cause, may be, it'll be best to telegraph to Boston to the doctor."

Suiting the action to the word, Persis tore open the envelope, and, unfolding the message, regarded it with a studious expression. She frowned, looked puzzled; then suddenly an indignant color overspread her face.

"The impudence!" she ejaculated. "I did n't know the doctor had an enemy left in the world, and here's some fool that hain't got sense enough to even know how to spell, insults him from 'way across the water."

"Oh, it can't be," returned Helen, incredulously.

"It's so, I say. He tells the doctor he's a kind of a crank. See? I've got a great mind to throw the thing in the fire and never say one word about it. It's below noticin'."

Helen bent her head curiously over the paper.

"Kinder krank," she murmured, puzzled. "Kinder krank;" then she flung up her hand with a start. "*Kinder krank!*" she exclaimed, with a change of pronunciation and tone. "Persis," with unreasoning intuition, "it is for Mr. Bruch. It is German. It means children sick, and it means his children. They must be very ill or the aunt would not have cabled, for they are poor. What shall we do?" The speaker looked around apprehensively, as though fearing the professor's genial face might appear from some unexpected source.

"Forever!" ejaculated Persis, aghast, looking from the paper to Helen's wide, shocked eyes and back again. "Ain't it a mistake? I don't see

how you make 'children sick' out o' that; besides, what is it sent to Dr. Latimer for, if you're right?"

"It is plain that the doctor must have permitted Mr. Bruch to use his cable address. Oh, Persis, who is going to tell him?" Helen sank into a piazza-chair and turned pale.

"I can't," returned Miss Applebee, panic-stricken. "It draws the sweat out o' me only to think of it."

All that was emotional in the housekeeper's nature had been touched by the German's affectionate longing for his little ones, and she shared the strong liking which every one who knew him felt for the simple, lovable man.

"If only Dr. Latimer were here," groaned Helen.

"Yes, I did think the island could run a day or two without him," returned Persis dismally, "but that's always the way."

"The worst of it is it can't be put off. I'll tell you, Persis," with returning energy. "Josephine is the one to do it. She was his first friend here and she must do it."

"Well, now, just don't say one word till dinner's over," advised Persis. "Give him a chance to get a good meal o' vittles down and he'll stand it better. Poor feller, I pity him from the very bottom o' my heart."

This sentiment was echoed by Josephine when she returned and the bad news was told her.

"You had better be the one to break it," declared Helen.

"Must I?" asked her sister, shrinking. "It is a cruel message," she added with rising indignation. "They should have said either more or less, when it is so far away."

"Oh, my dear, that is what tells the story to me," returned Helen, feelingly. "Don't think a word of blame of that poor aunt. She is breaking something as carefully as she can to Mr. Bruch."

"You don't think" — Josephine paused and regarded her sister with horror-stricken eyes.

"Oh, I think it means something very, very sad," returned the other, her voice wavering. They were at the dinner-table and Helen could eat nothing, though she played with her knife and fork and made pretense. The Ragged Island party had taken their lunch with them, so Persis and the girls were alone this noon.

"Well, if I must I must," replied Josephine, thinking of Dr. Latimer and trying to nerve herself by contemplation of his intrepid spirit.

"Be sure you don't let him suppose that we feel hopeless," said Helen warningly.

"No, I won't," was Josephine's docile reply.

"How do you think you will begin, dear?" asked her sister, regarding her anxiously.

"I'll tell you what you might do," suggested the housekeeper sympathetically. "You might begin talkin' about its bein' a sickly season in Germany,

and then say how surprisin' 't was there was so few deaths in spite of it, and talk along that way awhile and at last fetch out the message."

"I don't believe I can let any one do it but me," exclaimed Helen nervously.

"You are not fit to, my child," returned Josephine decidedly. "You have wrought yourself up over it until you are as white as a ghost, and your face would be enough to scare him to death in the first place."

"Then I'll — I'll look better," returned Helen, meekly, plucking at her cheeks to bring some color into them. "Give me some tea, Persis, and I will eat something."

"Why won't you let me, Helen?" asked Josephine, surprised.

"Because, no matter how you did it, I should see him suffer, and then I should always believe afterward that I could have done it better. I — I don't know as I can make you understand" — gulping down a swallow of tea with determination, "but I — would rather hurt him myself than have anybody else do it."

Josephine gazed at her sister unobserved, and then let her wondering glance rove to Persis; but that good soul's unimaginative and troubled countenance did not change.

"You are such a bewilderingly unselfish girl, Helen, that the usual calculations will not bring the answer to problems where you are concerned. I don't know whether to allow you to have your way or not."

"My mind is made up," returned Helen quietly, and she pushed her chair back from the table.

Persis shook her head and sighed as the girl went out of the door. From her seat she could see Helen walk to the edge of the bluff and stand waiting for Mr. Bruch to emerge from the *Nautilus*.

At this moment Miss Charlotte was pressing upon her guest a second cup of coffee, but the German shook his head.

"Thanks, no," he replied, "I have had completely enough." Then he caught sight of Helen, who had been careful to station herself where this was possible.

"There is Helen," observed Miss Agnes. "Go and talk to her, Mr. Bruch, while we put things to rights here."

So in another minute the professor approached the girl, whose heart rose and beat in her throat as he came near.

"You are looking over to Ragged Island, to try to see your sister, yes?" he said.

"Oh, I am quite easy about her. Mr. Randolph is a good sailor, and a much poorer one could navigate safely on a day like this," answered Helen, keeping her eyes still fixed on the distant rocky shore. "What have you on hand for this afternoon, Mr. Bruch?"

"Nothing whatever, and what is your plan?"

"I thought of walking down toward Little Harbor," returned Helen, her heart sinking again,

down, down, indefinitely under the genial, kindly gaze bent upon her.

"May I follow, or is your mood one for solitude?"

"I should like your company," she answered faintly. "Shall we walk on now?"

"Unless the sun is too hot for you. You are a little pale, it seems to me."

"You are too bad to amuse yourself at my expense," she answered, shaking her head with an effort at gayety. "We are all so brown that to look pale would be impossible. Let us go."

They turned toward the southern end of the island.

"Across the russet pastures to the sea
Their pathway led; in buoyant sunlit air
The blue waves flashed, rough'd by the north wind's glee,
And leaped in foam, where the black reef lay bare."

But Helen turned away from the water and led the way toward Rose Lane. Mr. Bruch's kindly intuitions told him, as he moved along beside her, that some anxiety lay at his companion's heart. He feared that, despite her denials, she was not easy concerning Vernon. In silence he waited her pleasure to speak while they passed through the narrowing lane until —

"Beyond, the pathway threaded out and in
Through a young-spreading growth of fir and spruce,
Wherein the wind sang softly, and wherein
The sweet sun-extracts from the resinous juice
Filled all the air. The tree-tops pricked the blue;
On either side the branches shut them in.
Where was the sea?"

The German looked at his companion. "What solemn, quiet shade we find," he said.

"Yes," answered the girl. "We might be a hundred miles inland, for all sign the ocean sends here on a day like this." The stillness of the wood was suddenly broken by a glad burst of melody.

"The bird that upward flew
Was not the white-winged gull, that o'er the din
Of the loud breakers wheeled and flashed, but brown
And small. His hurried, gay cadenza, flung
In a glad rush from boughs above them, down,
Was of green fields and sun-warmed valleys sung —
Of his shy partner and his meadow nest;
Not of the wide horizon of the sea :—
Small vistas, little pleasures, evening rest —
Not of immensity — eternity ! "

"Let us stay here a while," suggested Helen, turning out of the path and finding her way among the trees, until in a little clearing she seated herself upon a carpet of pine needles.

The professor followed her example. "Here we have evidence of our environment," he said, picking up the empty shell of a sea-urchin and holding toward Helen the pretty purple thing, with its exquisite symmetry of lace-work broken at one side.

"Yes," returned the girl. "The cables fly up with them from the shore and drop them from a height to break the shell, and then come down and eat them at their leisure."

"The — what sort of bird?" asked Mr. Bruch seriously.

"The crows — those big black birds. You must have seen many of them since you came."

"Ah, yes; I understood you to say a different word."

"I meant crows," replied Helen nervously. "There is one now," as the faint, harsh cry sounded on the air.

"I should like to send some of these pretty things to the little ones," said the German musically, turning the shell over in his hand.

Helen's throat felt dry. "Yes," she answered. "Vernon is making a collection now for some children in the hospital."

Then she bit her lip and felt that she had said a dreadful thing.

Bruch, looking up, was struck by the expression of her eyes. "She is frightened about Vernon," he thought more decidedly than before. Knowing her ready sympathy and the kindly interest she had always shown in his children, he could not think of anything more diverting for the moment than to continue on the subject.

"The little ones are about going to bed now," he said with innocent quiet. "I do not forget that time of the day when I take one upon each arm in their little white gowns and tell them a last story. Ewald was always for bears and lions, but Mina likes best the fairies of the forest. If you could look into the Mina's eyes, Miss Helen, you would say that no flower is bluer, no water is clearer, no star brighter; and the Ewald is a

strong and brave boy. The poor teacher is not so poor, after all." He sent a smile toward Helen, listening with parted lips and spell-bound gaze.

"Let us see what hour it is with them now," he added, drawing out the silver watch which had consoled the exile in so many crises of loneliness. He looked at it and his brow contracted. "Eh, what is this? The watch stops. It is a thing which never happened to me before."

A little chill crept over Helen, and the spell of her silence was broken. "No, no," she cried, vehemently, coming closer to him and leaning forward to see. "It can't have stopped!"

"It must be more than two hours that it does not go," returned the professor, perplexed and amazed.

"You must have calculated wrong," said Helen desperately. "Shake it. Something has just caught."

Mr. Bruch obediently shook the watch, and his companion shook it in her own trembling hand. Its wheels moved feebly and again became inert.

Helen tried heroically to control her own panic. She felt as though in a nightmare, and wished devoutly that she had not officiously taken upon herself a service to which she was proving shamefully unequal. Struggle as she might she could not prevent the overflow of two tears of whose passage she was unconscious, but her companion saw them.

"You are nervous to-day, Miss Helen," he said gently, while a flush mounted to his face, for the

girl's disproportionate sympathy, though astonishing, was very sweet to the lone man.

"I am, Mr. Bruch," she answered, looking at him with eyes as clear and innocent as his Mina's own. "I have come here this afternoon on purpose to tell you something that it will be hard for you to hear."

The German returned her gaze with peculiar steadiness, and a flush mounted slowly to his forehead.

"You will marry, yes?" he said briefly.

A fleeting surprise shone in the girl's troubled eyes. "No, no, you do not understand me," she answered, with a quick shake of the head. "I hope, Mr. Bruch, the news may not mean that there is any great cause for anxiety, but I have learned that your children are ill."

The other's expression changed suddenly. "The little ones? How could you hear?"

"By this." Helen held out the telegram. "I have not kept it from you long. It came to-day."

With a frown on his suddenly pale face her companion studied the message. The girl noted the manner in which he caught between his teeth the lip that would quiver and she knew that the course of reasoning which had appealed to her was intensified to the stricken father-heart.

It seemed to her a long time that the forest quiet remained unbroken, but it was scarcely half a minute before the German said, "I go to them;" and folded the cruel bit of paper.

"Oh, Mr. Bruch, think well over it," urged Helen, looking at him with her sympathetic heart in her eyes. "First thoughts are not always best, and it is such a long journey." She shrunk from suggesting more explicitly that his arrival might come too late.

The professor met her pleading gaze bravely. "I know what you would say if you dared, my dear lady," he replied unsteadily, "but the journey home is one which I make in any case before I determine if I settle in America. This sends me sooner, and perhaps if I waste no time God is so good to let me find the little ones."

"Then go, go," returned the girl, the tears streaming down her cheeks, "and we shall think of you every day and hope and pray that the children will get well — or if — if they do not, that you may have strength given you to bear it."

The German took the hands she stretched out to him in a strong clasp. "God is good to me already," he said thickly, "that He gives me your friendship. I think He does not refuse what you ask Him. Will you pray for the little ones?"

"Yes," replied the girl, keeping her full eyes appealingly on his pale face, "and most of all for you that you may be able to bear whatever comes. You will write to — Dr. Latimer? We shall be so anxious to hear."

"May I write to you?" asked Bruch simply.

"I shall be very glad if you write to me," returned the girl.

They stood a moment more with searching look into one another's white faces.

"I go now," said the German, at last.

"Leave me here," returned Helen.

He bowed his head above the hands he was clasping and kissed first one and then the other.

"Auf wiedersehen," he murmured, with a last yearning gaze, then hurried away without a backward look.

Helen sank down trembling upon the pine needles. For a long time she lay there, her face in her hands, trying to think, trying to fulfill her promise to pray, while her imagination, escaping control, fluttered from scenes just past to scenes future, with a strange intermingling of joy, apprehension, compassion, and anxiety. She saw the solitary figure of her friend facing the wide expanse of water from the steamer's deck, his longings traveling faster than the white-winged birds toward strong, brave Ewald and the clear-eyed Mina, whose forest fairies seemed now whispering hopes and fears in the fragrant silence that lay about her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE THUNDERING HOLE.

By good fortune Mr. Bruch and Dr. Latimer did not miss one another in Boston, and when the latter returned he was able to respond to the friendly inquiries concerning the German's movements in a manner which gave special comfort to Helen. Since Dr. Latimer had been at hand to provide and advise and arrange and sanction, she could surely rest now in the thought that all which human prudence could devise had been well done, and there was nothing left to do but to wait in patience for a letter.

To Josephine's queries as to how she had performed her task of informing Mr. Bruch, Helen gave a satisfactory though general reply, and after one night of going to bed early on the plea of headache, she appeared precisely as before to the eyes of her sisters. She told them nothing of the little boy who was "all for bears and lions," or of Mina's cornflower eyes. These details were a part of that certainty which had reached her among the pines, — a certainty which had come to her heart while it was aching and made its sensitiveness more keen. She tried not to envy the radiant, prosperous Jo-

sephine or merry Vernon, and found comfort, like the faithful, sensible soul she was, in working more earnestly to fill the cup of others, finding therein the happiness which comes with richest fullness to those who seek it not.

Perhaps none of the summer party expressed more feeling for the absent professor than Olin, and his heartfelt manner of repeating "Poor old Bruch" conveyed, in its variations of tone but unvarying sincerity, a sympathy which unconsciously gained him many a kindness from Helen, whose silent approbation was so sweet that had it been long continued it might have caused Vernon's gayety to be again imperiled.

But comments, prognostications, and doubts concerning father and children soon ceased to be the chief subject of conversation on the cliff, and life moved on as before.

One morning soon after the doctor's return, a gale having lashed the water into tumult, it was suggested that all should walk to the southern end of the island to visit the natural cave in the rock, known as the Thundering Hole.

The way led through that very path to the sea which Helen had last trod with Mr. Bruch, and the expedition was timed so as to reach the goal as the tide turned to go out.

Even Persis, in view of the majestic sight to be expected, consented to leave her household cares for once and join the party, and Puggy, who was eminently gregarious in disposition, seeing the in-

tention of all his friends to depart, carefully weighed in the balance the two evils of remaining behind alone and going with them. He understood perfectly the indications of a general investing in shawls, tied-down hats, and pilgrim staves. He knew the intention of his infatuated and misguided companions was to seek a spot where the wind was uncomfortably high and one could not escape being flecked with salt water. Arriving finally at the decision to immolate himself on the altar of friendship, he made his own simple preparations, which consisted in uncurling his tail, and was ready.

The little cavalcade moved down through the lane and the narrow path, until the blue waters of Little Harbor, bravely foam-tipped to-day, shone through the trees. Skirting the curving beach of the harbor, they again entered the woods and walked over rising ground to the rugged end of the island, between whose rocks and the jagged borders of Jaquish, lying near, the "emerald cliffs" upreared and broke, rushing with headlong abandon upon the steadfast granite.

Climbing down among the boulders with varying degrees of fearless sure-footedness, the party disposed themselves in favorable positions to command a view of the cave, a small segment of whose mysterious orifice showed above the mad whirl of the waters.

The huge wave rushing in with a crash was met by some invisible power which, in apparent resent-

ment of the rough invasion, expelled the intruder with a deep, thunderous roar and a force which shot into space a volley of water in a bright, high-reaching arc, to splash back at last among the tumbling billows.

Not much was said for a time, as all eyes were fixed upon the grand commotion, and Puggy, standing in a fit of indecision, on a high, comfortless point of rock where he was buffeted by the wind, expressed in every wrinkle of his contemptuous countenance and his rose-leaf bit of tongue his opinion of the discrimination which gave this situation the preference over sunny, sheltered corners of the piazza at home. As Mr. Bruch would have said, he found the beauties of nature "vera boresome."

Agnes Norman and Josephine were sitting together on the advantageous ledge which the doctor had found for them, and as the tide receded Josephine amused herself by scooping up handfuls of water which had lodged in a hollow near by and pouring it upon a group of dry barnacles. She was delighted whenever one opened his little door and reached up an eager hand for food.

Everything the girl did seemed good and interesting to her lover, and gradually he became less heedful of what Agnes was saying to him, and more attentive to the movement of the hand that was his own though animated by another brain.

Miss Norman smiled a little and stopped talking.

"I am going home, Josephine," announced Dr. Latimer at last.

"Just wait a minute," she responded idly; "they are waking up beautifully. Evidently the theory of tides does n't trouble them in the least. They think the millennium has come and it is going to be high tide all the time."

"But I don't want you to come," returned the doctor, and then smiled at the sudden turn of the head and surprised upward glance she gave him. "I have some work to do," he added, after a silent moment in which he fondly gazed down at her. "You come later with Agnes. It is too bad to leave this so soon."

"Well," she returned, after the slightest pause of reluctance, "good-by, Dr. Latimer." She reached up to him the hand which she had carefully kept dry. Upon it gleamed one large, lustrous pearl, which had parted company with the sea forever.

He took the hand in his with a strong, loving pressure, and they exchanged a look of perfect confidence.

"Good-by," he answered, and then sprang up the rocks.

"Let Puggy go with you," called Miss Charlotte, who sat in a lofty eyrie opposite, with Persis; but Puggy had departed with Olin, Dickie, Vernon, and Helen, who were moving along the shore, as the small dog fervently trusted, in search of softer climes.

"I'm goin' to look in at the Martins' before I go back," remarked Persis. "It's lonely for the cap'n's wife, now he's off sword-fishin', and I'd better be stirrin', for I've got to be home to get dinner."

"I'll go with you," said Miss Charlotte. "But oh, there's a splendid wave, Persis! We must see it break."

Josephine saw them rise. "Everybody is going or gone," she remarked. "We might as well go back. You will take me in at the Nautilus a few minutes, won't you, since Dr. Latimer is so afraid I shall disturb him?"

"I hereby formally invite you to dinner," returned Agnes. She took Josephine's arm as they rose and held her a minute while she looked into her face. "You're a very happy woman, aren't you, my dear?" she said musingly.

"Is there such a thing as being too happy, Agnes?" asked the girl wistfully. At her friend's request she had learned to address her thus informally. "I don't mean the question in a superstitious sense; I only mean that perhaps it is n't quite in good taste for me to look as I sometimes see myself suddenly when I chance to pass a mirror."

Miss Norman smiled. "Is it in good taste for the sun to shine? I think it is. If I do not complain, nobody should. Before your reign I was Dr. Latimer's chosen companion and confidante, and now, if you happen to be near, he is not sure to hear me when I speak."

"How good you are to me!" exclaimed the girl, with a burst of grateful acknowledgment. "What an unselfish person you must be, Agnes."

"No," was the calm rejoinder. "It exactly suited me to have the doctor love you, and, therefore, he cannot love you too much to please me."

"I have always wondered so," said Josephine hesitatingly, and with an apology in her eyes, "how it could be that — oh, it is execrable in me to say it, and I won't."

"I understand you. Don't you know it is a peculiarity of lovers to congratulate themselves upon the blindness of the rest of the world?"

"After honoring me with your confidence as you once did, I should not be supposed to have such a thought," returned the girl hastily, "but the very bitterness of your experience must have made his qualities shine by contrast, and you were so intimate, and you are both so good."

There was a mist over the dark eyes as Josephine ceased.

Agnes kissed her. "It must look a little puzzling to you, but there were circumstances in the case which would make it clearer if it were worth while to rake up a dead-and-gone past, which it most certainly is not. Now don't look questioning," she added, with a sauciness assumed to hide her apprehension of arousing Josephine's curiosity. "My secrets are my own, and the less interesting ones I intend to keep. Instead of asking conun-

drums, why are n't you grateful to me for saving Dr. Latimer for you all these years?"

"Oh, I am," replied the girl, humbly. "I am grateful in every fibre of my being."

They ascended the rocks leisurely and moved in among the trees. Josephine took a twig from a fir as she walked on, and hummed a little tune. The summer sun drew rich odors from the full boughs that bent to let them pass. The waters of Little Harbor sparkled and courtesied gayly as the tide went out, and they walked dryshod over the hard sand so recently immersed.

Entering the narrow path which led home, Agnes walked in advance, thinking the thoughts which Josephine's question had set in train. All at once she stopped and listened; then turned to her companion.

"I thought I heard Dr. Latimer's voice," she said. "Let us go softly and surprise him."

They moved forward again, their steps soundless on the grassy path, until a turn revealed through an aisle of the forest moving figures in a clearing at a short distance, the very spot where a few days ago Helen had tried to soften the blow to her friend.

Agnes was the first to see a woman kneeling on the ground, her arms outstretched and her face wildly imploring. She jumped back involuntarily and caught Josephine by the wrist before she recognized that Dr. Latimer was the object of the woman's regard. He was standing half-leaning

against a tree, and only his side-face was visible from the path.

Josephine was so startled by her friend's action and pallor, that, viewing the tableau, she whispered fearfully:—

"Who is it?"

"The woman who stole my lover," whispered Agnes fiercely, her breast panting with the overwhelming associations which the sight evoked. Such was the tumult of her sudden excitement that she forgot it was Josephine upon whom she was leaning heavily.

"Poor Agnes," murmured the girl below her breath. "But what can she want of Dr. Latimer?"

"She is his wife."

The words came with a quick, painful effort of Miss Norman's breath. "Heaven forgive me, Josephine!" she ejaculated with sudden recollection, concentrating her attention on her companion. "Don't faint. You must n't," she added, with short, sharp imperativeness. "Think of him. He must n't find you here. Come home. Lean on me. You can. Be brave."

With her arm around her friend they fled stumbling along the path, and all the sweet day was turned to the semblance of a terrible dream whose chiefest horror followed them in their flight with a wild wail:—

"Just this once, Paul. Just this once more. I will be true!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOOD-NIGHT.

WHEN Persis, with sturdy, hurried step, approached the Sea Shell a little later, she flung a laughing good-by to Miss Charlotte, who had accompanied her.

"The laborin' class has got to go at it," she observed. "Holiday's over."

She took the back-door key down from its hook and let herself in. Taking off her hat, she placed that, her shawl, and her staff, in the curtained niche in the parlor; then, returning to the kitchen, lighted the wicks in the oil stove. She had filled the tea-kettle and was placing it in position, when she heard a rap on the glass of the locked door. Turning around she saw Miss Charlotte, who rattled the door-handle.

"Go 'round by the front way, please," called Persis, gesticulating. "The wind's so strong it puts my wicks out."

"Let me in! Let me in!" cried Miss Charlotte, and rapped the harder. Persis noticed a disturbance of her face and unlocked the door.

"Quick as you can, then!" she cried, rather resentful of this willfulness, guarding the stove with her outstretched skirt. "You know" —

"Oh, Persis!" exclaimed Miss Charlotte distractedly, as the door was swiftly closed, "a terrible thing has happened. The poor doctor! That woman has come back!"

"What woman?" asked the other, instinctively summoning her forces to meet some emergency, and speaking stonily. "You don't mean the vampire? She's dead."

"No, she is n't," groaned Miss Norman. "She is on the island this minute."

"She died in Paris five years ago," said Persis, staring at the other doggedly. "I read it myself. Amelia Hegner Latimer, wife of Paul Latimer, Esquire, of Boston, U. S. A. Impudent in life, in death she wan't any better."

"Persis, you *must* take it in!" returned Charlotte severely, shaking the dazed woman by the arm. "She has come back. She has met Dr. Latimer, and Josephine knows it, and is in at our house with Agnes. I can't stay away another minute. You must explain it to the girls the best way you can," and with a parting nervous shake to Miss Applebee's arm, Miss Charlotte whisked out and away, her drab locks flying in the wind.

Persis stood staring straight before her; then a great dry sob convulsed the faithful breast. Laboriously she went down on her knees before a chair and clasped her hands on its wooden seat.

"O Father, Thy will be done!" came panting, half-aloud, from her lips. "Help us all. Help

Josephine the most, for she's young, and she sets so by the doctor. Show me what to say to the girls. Oh, there they be, now!" and the poor woman scrambled to her feet as Vernon's laugh sounded merrily at the front door.

"Yes, we will go into the cove at three," called the bright, young voice. "The water is sure to be warm. Helen has just rushed us home, Persis," she added, coming in breezily, "she was so afraid she would not be in time to set the table; but Ike Johnson has shot the queerest fish, and he has it up there on the beach, and I made her stop to look at it."

"Yes, you can see it from the window," added Helen. "Come and look. He calls it a herring-hog. Such a name! It does have a piggy look with its little bits of eyes and all its hungry teeth set about a mouth like a whale's. He is going to try out its oil for his guns, and" —

"Yes, yes," interrupted Persis. "Now, I've got to ask you to be strong, good children, and listen bravely to some bad news, 'cause we've all got to take hold together and do the best we can to bear it."

"Mr. Bruch?" exclaimed Helen, with dilated eyes.

"No, 't ain't anything concernin' his affairs. Troubles never come singly, and this one's nearer home;" then, seeing the terror in the girls' faces: "Nobody's dead; I wish they — Pshaw! I must n't say that. Come here." She drew one

of the wondering girls down on either side of her upon the divan.

"When Dr. Latimer was a very young man," she began determinedly, "he went to Vienna to study in the hospitals as a kind of an end-off to his education. There in an evil day he met a black-eyed girl and fell in love with her. I s'pose she was as weak and bad a nature as ever lived, but he was all wrapped up in her, and he married her and fetched her home to Boston. His mother was an angel o' goodness to that girl, and fortunately she died before the young woman's capers got scandalous, though she was so extravagant that folks said she'd ruin the doctor, rich as he was. Well, Miss Agnes Norman was engaged to a man who took the eye o' this bad young woman, and the night before Miss Agnes' weddin' was to have come off, she eloped with him. There ain't no use o' dwellin' on that time. It came just like a clap o' thunder on the doctor, and laid him up a spell with fever. He hain't been the same man since, but, as you know, he's been the kind of a man that don't very often get met with here below. He rose up at last and tried to do what could be done for that woman. He saw now what she was, and he set to to see if he could keep her from fallin' any lower. It would be a weary story and not an improvin' one if I should tell you the half o' what he's been through. The man she run away with was killed the very next week in a railroad accident. I don't know as Miss Agnes

knows it to this day, but no matter about that. The smartness and ingeniousness that woman has shown in managin' to keep a hold on the doctor, pretendin' to have a child, pretendin' to reform, pretendin' everythin' that could make a claim on a man's conscience, passes belief. Five years ago came a release, signed and sealed, in the shape of a notice of her death in the Boston papers. Dr. Latimer traced it back to the paper in Paris, where it first appeared, but, oh, girls, the worst hain't been told yet. Even dyin' was only pretense with her. She could n't do anythin' so respectable. She's alive and here on this island to-day!"

"Where is Josephine?" asked both girls in a breath.

"In next door. She knows it."

"But, is Dr. Latimer not divorced from the woman?" asked Helen.

"I don't believe so," answered Persis wretchedly. "And s'posin' he was! I should n't have any hope of his bein' happy or takin' comfort with anybody else while she's above ground."

She looked despairingly at the carpet, and the sisters looked at each other.

"Will she come here?" asked Vernon apprehensively.

"Not while I've got my health," replied Persis.

A long, quick step was heard on the piazza, and Olin Randolph came impetuously into the room. Vernon sprang to her feet.

It may be illogical, but the fact remains, that when a woman loves a man, it is her firm conviction that he is all-powerful either to ward off or heal trouble. The cyclone will not destroy, the lightning will not strike, no sorrow or misfortune of the inner life will crush, provided he stands near.

Vernon's spirits sprang up with her body, in vague hopefulness. The young man's eyes were blazing with feeling. All the imperturbable indifference of his face was gone.

"Has Dr. Latimer come back?" he asked quickly.

"No."

"Vernon, that is the woman we met in Portland. She knew me by some resemblance to my family. Why didn't some intuition suggest to me to shove her into the water! Girls, I'm sorry for you," he held out an energetic hand to each of them and wrung theirs with painful, unconscious force.

"What does Josephine say?" asked Helen.

"I haven't seen her. My aunts thought it might be best for me to take Bruch's place at the Cliffords' if they would let me in, and give Josephine my room for a day or two until things settle down.

"What are you going to do about it all?" asked Vernon, looking up at him with trustful eyes.

"I don't know of anything I could do except commit a murder, and there is a popular prejudice

against that. We must all be very careful not to let a hint of this get out among the neighbors."

"Dr. Latimer will advise us"—began Helen, and then wrung her hands together in helpless realization that this sorrow was Dr. Latimer's own, and that it was not possible to appeal to him as usual. "How long I am staying away from Josephine," she added. "I dread so to see her"—

Softly the front door opened again and Josephine herself came in. Her unexpected appearance sent a galvanic thrill through the company assembled. Helen started to run toward her, but was restrained by the expression of her sister's face. Her cheeks, usually so soft and white, were flushed, her eyes wore a bewildered expression as though she had but just waked up. There was a little questioning frown on her forehead, but she had not the despairing look they had expected to see.

"Hasn't Dr. Latimer come back yet?" she asked.

"No," answered Persis, "and if I don't stir 'round there won't be any dinner for him when he does come," and rising with an elaborately careless air, while her heart thumped violently against her ribs, she found her way into the kitchen.

Helen and Vernon began to set the table.

Olin addressed Josephine. "Am I to move my traps out of my room?" he asked, his kind concern showing through his commonplace words.

"What for?" asked the girl, turning her confused glance upon him.

"Aunt Charlotte said something about claiming you for a visit," he returned, looking away from her eyes.

"No. I am not going to stay in there," she answered indifferently. "I am waiting now for Dr. Latimer."

"Well, I will see you all again," remarked Randolph, feeling very awkward as he took himself out of the room.

Josephine went to the south window and gazed across the fields. Her sisters went on silently with their work, with frightened, heavy hearts.

Dr. Latimer did not appear at dinner-time, though they waited until long past the usual hour.

Finally, reluctantly, Persis drew a chair to the table. "I s'pose 't ain't any use to wait any longer," she remarked tentatively, addressing Josephine's back. The other girls took their places, anxiously eyeing their sister, who made no sign.

"I think, Josephine," said Helen, after a minute, "if you would come and sit down and not watch any longer he will be much more likely to come."

Upon this the girl turned, with a sighing breath, and came obediently to take her place. While her companions all felt anxious embarrassment, she appeared almost unconscious of their presence, and even began to eat mechanically what they set before her.

The others felt that nothing was to be said upon the subject uppermost in their minds until the doctor's return, and Vernon began talking about the porpoise lying down below on the beach.

In the midst of her labored remarks Josephine spoke, evidently unconscious of interrupting.

"Did you know, girls, that Dr. Latimer had been married?"

For a second there was no sound but that made by Persis dropping her fork.

"We did n't know it till to-day, dear," replied Helen.

"I did," said Josephine. "He told me some time ago. It was a very unhappy marriage, and she died. That is all he told me."

"He meant to tell you the truth," hazarded the housekeeper in a timid voice. "You can depend on that."

The girl looked up at her wonderingly. "It is strange you should think you must tell me that, Persis," she said quietly.

"Well, I" — stammered the housekeeper, then she raised her teacup and drank busily.

Josephine pushed her chair back restlessly from the table, rose, and went out of doors. The others could see her as she moved slowly along the grassy bluff. The tide was out, and the round, weed-grown rocks on the shore below looked like groups of witches' heads with dank, stringy hair, huddled together in grewsome conference.

"How strangely she takes it!" observed Vernon, regarding her elders anxiously.

"What do you make of her, Miss Helen?" asked Persis, almost in the same breath.

Helen's eyes filled. "I don't know; she is either dazed or terribly excited. She evidently has not shed a tear."

"Oh, dear me!" said Vernon. "I'm afraid to have her out there alone. She reminds me of Ophelia. There is no telling what she will do."

"Don't cry, dear," returned Helen. "She is full now of the one idea of seeing Dr. Latimer. All I fear is that she may grow so restless and impatient that she will start off to find him. I do not mean to allow her to go out of my sight."

Pursuant of this idea, Helen sought the piazza, book in hand, and seated herself as if to read. Soon, as she had expected, Josephine turned and began walking back toward the lane.

Helen dropped her book and ran after her. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"To see if I can find Paul."

"I would n't."

"You do not understand. I can't wait any longer."

"That is not a sensible way to do at all," returned Helen, with decision. "What shall we say to him if he returns and you are not here? Every minute makes it more likely that he will come, and you have not the least idea where to look. Very likely whatever he is busied about is

for your sake, and if you should happen to run across him you would only disturb him and upset his plans. Trust what I say, Josephine. You know I have never deceived you, and would not advise what I did not believe was for your happiness. Come with me;" she took the other's arm and Josephine yielded undecidedly. "Come and lie in the hammock and let me read to you. That will make the time pass quickly until Dr. Latimer comes."

She led her sister, unresisting, back to the piazza, and did not relax her urgency until the girl was stretched in the swinging cradle, her hot cheek resting on her hand and her brilliant eyes looking out to sea. Helen seated herself on the step near and began to read aloud.

It was a weary afternoon, and the strain was hard upon Helen, for the slow hours passed and Dr. Latimer did not come. Josephine did not hear what was read and grew impatient of control, and the younger sister watched her burning eyes and cheeks with apprehension. But by the magic of Helen's gentleness and the tact with which she yielded or restrained, supper-time came at last without Josephine's having resorted to other measures than short walks away from the house with the faithful sister at her side.

Agnes Norman was blind with one of the headaches to which she was subject, and Miss Charlotte was occupied with her. Olin was nowhere to be seen. Vernon kept close to Persis all the

afternoon, occasionally peeping furtively from a window to catch a glimpse of Helen and her charge. It did not seem to her the same world they had all lived in yesterday.

After tea, which was a neglected meal, twilight found the same expectant hush prevailing about the two cottages. A neighbor from farther up the cliff came blithely to a window of the Sea Shell and called in that everybody was going to the staircase to watch the moon rise, and exhorted the girls to come.

Vigilant Helen flew to the window. "Yes," she replied, nodding pleasantly. "The rest of you go on. Don't wait for us. Won't it be a superb sight this clear night?"

The messenger ran ahead to join her party. "Go, Vernon," suggested Helen; but the youngest shook her head. The dizzying whirl of foam at the staircase would be unbearable to-night.

Darkness fell. Persis sat by the table and went through the motions of reading her newspaper.

Josephine walked up and down the room in increasing unrest, and at last moved toward the door.

"Moon's due," observed Miss Applebee, looking at the clock, and Helen and Vernon threw down their books and followed their sister out of doors.

The top of the great red disk was visible already, the waves silhouetted unevenly against it, and a suggestion of shimmering light foretold the glory to come.

Persis came out and stood on the piazza. Where could Dr. Latimer be? Her brain was weary with conjecturing. The day had been long, but the night was even more depressing. She looked pityingly after Josephine, who had gone a little distance and who now opened the gate in the cliff railing.

Helen sprang up. "Josephine!" she cried, running to her, all the fears of the day condensed into an unreasoning horror.

The other turned and regarded her curiously.

"What is the matter?" she asked, quietly.

"I—don't know," stammered Helen in confusion. "You frightened me."

"You behave as though you were afraid I might do something desperate,—leap off the cliff, for instance. What should I do that for?"

"You—of course not," replied Helen incoherently.

"I don't know why I opened the gate. Perhaps I opened it to the tide. It took my happiness when it went out. It is coming back now. I wish you would leave me a few minutes," she added piteously. "All the afternoon I have wanted time to think, and you would not let me. You are good, Helen, but you irritate me."

"I suppose I do," answered poor Helen, meekly, and she went back to the piazza, from which vantage ground she could watch her sister, whose figure came out with great and greater distinctness in the growing radiance of the slowly rising, vast

red moon. The path of bright, rough silver flashed across the sea and a ship's sails stood distinctly outlined against the wheel of fire.

With magnificent deliberation the tide was coming in, and the powerful hwhish-sh of its long sweep was the only sound that broke the stillness. The neighboring cottages, all save the Nautilus, were deserted, and that gave no sign of life.

All at once a man's tall figure came out of the distant shadow and walked along the cliff. He drew near the spot where Josephine was standing. She felt his presence, — perhaps heard his footfall, heavy with fatigue.

Turning eagerly, a long sigh of relief escaped her. "Paul!"

She was in his arms when the three women on the piazza hastily withdrew into the house.

Dr. Latimer's cheek pressed the dark head that rested on his shoulder. "Is this the greeting you have for me still, Josephine?" he asked.

"Why not? Oh, you have been gone so long."

"Yet you know what has come to me," he answered. "I saw you with Agnes, there by the wood as you hurried away."

"What has come to us," she corrected him. "Can anything come to you that does not come to me as well?"

"Oh, Josephine!" The exclamation escaped him with a painful catch of the breath.

"I suppose I understand it. I try to. I think once in a while that I comprehend it all, but it slips away. It will not be real."

"My poor-darling!" The ineffable compassion in his voice thrilled her.

"Don't call me that," she said hastily, raising her head and confronting him. "Don't speak as though I were so much to be pitied. You would n't let anything come between us, Paul?"

"You do not understand, I am afraid," he returned, making a heroic struggle for self-possession, while her burning hand clung desperately to his. "When I offered my life to you, Josephine, I thought I was through with rough paths."

"Do you think I fear rough paths?" she returned eagerly. "Try me. Where you go I can go, and no matter what comes you will hear no complaint, for I shall feel none. Without you" — she bowed her head against his breast — "all paths would be equally barren. Nothing would matter."

He held her in his arms and looked with weary eyes across the silver-sheeted water.

"Do you believe in God, Josephine?" he asked at last.

"I thought I did," she answered desolately.

"I do," said Dr. Latimer simply.

Then there was another silence.

Presently she looked up at him. "God has let the woman live whom you thought was dead. He has let her come back; but she has no claim upon you except a legal one. Why should you not dissolve that tie and forget her living as you had forgotten her dead?" she asked vehemently.

"You do not know what you say. If I married you while that woman is living I should be guilty. You would have a dangerous enemy and our life would know neither sacredness nor peace."

"Paul," she groaned. "What are you saying? What are you implying?"

Her face looked so white in the moonlight, and she leaned on him so heavily that he took her up in his arms and carried her into the cottage.

The room was lighted and empty. Dr. Latimer laid the half-fainting woman upon the divan, and going to the improvised sideboard, poured some liquid into a glass. She drank it obediently, then he drew up a chair beside her.

For the first time they saw clearly one another's faces. The circles that the anguish of the day had deepened about the doctor's eyes woke aching remorse in Josephine.

"Teach me to be brave, Paul," she said, raising herself among the pillows and passing the back of her hand across her forehead, as though to brush away the cloud that seemed settling over her.

"I believe there is no easy way to learn the lessons of life," he answered. "I have been practicing, studying, very many years, as it seems to me. I told you that I felt old, and this is the sort of thing that ages one. You are young and weak and tender, and the chief pang to me in this last blow is that I have drawn it upon you with dreadful force, and that by no means can I bear it for you."

The tired face, the lines that seemed to have come into it during a few hours, appealed to Josephine with a strength which momentarily lifted her above the contemplation of her blighted hopes.

"Do you not know," she said, "that this period of our engagement has contained such happiness to me that even to escape the dreary future I would not give it up?"

He regarded her with a grateful brightening of his sad face.

"I will do as you tell me," she added, biting her lip to control its quivering. "This is something we must bear together."

He put his hand over the one that wore the pearl, while his eyes rested on her with an expression that revealed more than his words.

"You must have lived such a life as mine was before I knew you, to understand what you have been and are to me," he answered, and his sincere, deliberate speech never sounded more like sweet music to his companion's ears. "In cutting myself off from the happiness of being near you I am" —

"Paul, Paul, you are not going away!" the exclamation was an involuntary wail. "Oh, forgive me. Be patient with me. Tell me why it is necessary. I will try to see it."

Her contrition, her helpless love for him, almost destroyed the man's long-trained endurance.

He bowed his head and pressed his lips to her hand.

"Josephine," he said, suddenly looking up, "how many scenes of this sort could we bear, you and I? Can't you see that it must be that we separate?"

He had never spoken so sharply, and the pallor of his face startled her more than his words. The long, mysterious strain which the day had been to him, his present suffering, nerved her.

"You are right," she answered with a calmness that astonished him. "We must appear to separate. Nothing can ever really separate us, Paul?" She leaned toward him as she spoke, her eyes full of soft brilliance.

"If you mean to ask me if I shall ever stop loving you, no. I love you with all my being. My last thought at night and my first in the morning will always be of you; and when I waken some day in that other world whose existence is as real to me as this, my first thought will be: 'She is here,' or 'She is coming.'"

The girl listened with parted lips, and a faint rosiness unlike the feverish color crept into her pale face.

"And now, to decide on our course," he continued, holding her hands close and speaking calmly. "Will you let me direct it?"

"I will do exactly what you say."

"Then you will remain here with your sisters and Persis, while I go back to Boston, to-morrow."

"I do not think it is right for you to be deprived

of this place, which you need more than the girls and I do."

"Did n't you say you would obey me?" he asked, with a sad smile.

"Yes, and I will, exactly."

"It is not best for me to stay here, for more reasons than one."

Josephine bowed. "Shall you write to me?" she asked, looking at him beseechingly. "I will tell you what I fear. It is so hard for me to adjust myself to the situation. My mind repels it obstinately. I am afraid when you are gone" — her voice wavered and she paused a second before going on bravely — "I shall not be able to realize it. My mind — my head felt very strange this afternoon."

Dr. Latimer pressed his lips together and returned her gaze thoughtfully. It was half a minute before he spoke.

"Listen, my darling," he began quietly. "In one way I am not going away from you at all. You shall hear from me directly or indirectly every day. Do you understand? Every day. You must write to me every day, also. Will you?"

Josephine only gave a fleeting smile for answer.

"What will you do when I get back to Boston?" she asked, looking at him searchingly.

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," he answered evasively. "For the present, I am preceding you to the city, and that is all you are to think of. Perhaps it will help you, dear," he

added, with apologetic hesitation, it was such a foreign argument for him to use — “it may help you, when you become depressed, to think of my hard lot, and remember that the brightest ray of comfort that can come to me is to know that you are bearing yours well. I believe you will,” he added in a confident tone. “I believe you are capable of heroism for my sake.”

He had touched the right chord. Exhortation to do her duty would have found and left her apathetic. An appeal for his sake went to the quick of her nature.

“And now you must take some rest, Josephine. We are both spent with the experiences of this day. Good-night, dear.” He tried to say it with good cheer, but a little muscle twitched at the corner of his mouth as they both rose.

The girl’s beauty was touching in its meekness and effort at courage. Her mournful eyes under their long lashes appealed to her companion with mute eloquence.

“Good-night,” he repeated, and stooped to kiss her as was his wont.

“Good-night,” she answered, and contrary to her habit she put both her arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly.

Then with a docile air she mechanically turned toward the stairs and began to ascend.

“Josephine!”

She turned around. Dr. Latimer was standing beneath the hanging lamp, pale, unsmiling, with

such yearning in his eyes as drew her quickly back. He stepped toward her and folded her in his arms.

"Dear love," he said, and kissed her hair and brow.

A great sob rent her breast, and the first tears she had shed in the long day flowed from her eyes as she clung to him.

He thanked God in his heart, for the saving drops, while he smoothed her hair and lavished upon her every endearing title in the lovers' category.

"Good-night, now, and every night, my Josephine," he said, when at last they parted lingeringly.

The lights were extinguished; the cottage was still. The soft radiance, silvering the sheets of white foam that crept high about the island under the full moon, fell on the bowed head of a man who watched by his window until with the first streaks of dawn he left the house, not to return.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"A BEAUTIFUL SECRET."

WHEN Persis came down at her usual hour that morning to light the wicks in her oil stove she found a folded bit of paper on the table addressed to her. It told her that Dr. Latimer had returned to Boston, but that he wished her to stay at the island as long as the young ladies' engagements would permit them to remain. He commended the girls to her kind care and told her she would hear from him from time to time. Beside this note was one in an envelope bearing Josephine's name.

The startled woman went to the doctor's room and, finding the door open, looked in. The bed had evidently not been lain upon. She stifled a groan as she turned away, and tiptoed about with great care not to wake the girls. She felt that there was nothing but unhappiness for them to wake up to this morning, and wondered dismally what had transpired during Josephine's interview with the doctor the night before.

"If he's stole a march on her and that note's the first warnin' she'll have of it, I don't covet to give it to her," she soliloquized.

When Helen came down she beckoned her mysteriously into the kitchen.

"Dr. Latimer's gone," she whispered.

"Has he? Then Josephine knows it, for when I urged her to stay in bed this morning she consented."

"I hope to the land she does know it, and here's a letter he's left for her."

When Helen carried up her sister's breakfast, the note lay on the tray. Josephine, white and listless — Josephine, with all her brilliancy faded, gained a transient glad flush as she eagerly opened the envelope. Helen saw that the written message was brief, but her sister, after reading and re-reading it, held it between her clasped hands as though whatever it contained gave her comfort.

Helen later began to brush and braid her sister's hair, and when the gentle hands had finished their task Josephine thanked her.

"I am afraid I was cross to you last night by the gate, Helen," she said.

"No, you were n't, my dear. I never thought of it."

"You were very good to me and very patient yesterday," went on the other, with her sad eyes on her sister's face. "It was a hard day for us both."

"Don't mention my part of it," returned the younger, as she sat down on the side of the bed.

"Everything is more hopeless than my worst apprehensions imagined," said Josephine drearily,

"and now the next thing is to see how I am going to live so as not to be a trial to my friends."

"You have two friends to whom you can never be a trial." The tears started in Helen's eyes as she spoke, but she resolutely forced them back.

"My sisters are the very ones upon whom I am most anxious not to be a drag. Dr. Latimer expects me to be heroic, and I don't want to disappoint him, but he is so much the better part of me. He seems to have taken all my vitality, all my power of resistance with him."

Vernon was noiselessly putting things to rights on the bureau, meekly keeping away from Josephine in the respect and awe she felt for her sorrow.

"I want to own my weakness frankly to you and Vernon, as you are the most likely to suffer from it; but I am going to try, girls — only I am very tired this morning."

"You have had a great nervous shock, Josephine," replied Helen. "You must give yourself time to recover from it. Then remember, it might have been worse."

"How could it?"

"Dr. Latimer might have been drowned."

"Yes," Josephine clasped closer the few words, whose warmth even written seemed to penetrate her heart with a feeble glow; "but in that case he would have suffered less. This blow is a terrible thing to him."

"He can bear it, however," returned the other

firmly, "because he does not try to carry his burdens in his own strength. His greatest temptation in this will be lack of trust for you. That anxiety will prey upon him most of all unless you can relieve it."

Josephine looked into her sister's clear eyes wonderingly. "How did you know that?"

"Only by knowing Dr. Latimer. The secret of his influence over people is only that absolute trust in God which he has learned somehow in life's school. He puts self out of the way more than any one we ever knew, and so a power shines through him which is not of this world, and people when they come near him feel all that is morally best in them being drawn forward, and are conscious of crowding out of sight all that they would be ashamed to have come to his notice. It is a great thing to be loved by a man like that, Josephine."

"Yes, yes," replied the latter, keeping her eyes fixed thirstily on her sister. "How much good you do me, Helen."

"I don't like to seem to preach to you, for, were I in your place, I am sure I should be very weak; but in my own trials," Helen's face flamed in a surprising blush, "I find that trying to feel as I believe Dr. Latimer would, helps me to be strong."

"What can you mean?"

Helen hesitated a moment, then with the conviction that the new channel for Josephine's

thought would be a helpful diversion, continued: "I am thinking very much in these days about Mr. Bruch's troubles, and dreading the message he will send us when he reaches home."

"I had forgotten him," said Josephine. "That is the difference between you and me."

"No it is n't," returned Helen incoherently. "It matters a great deal to me what happens to Mr. Bruch."

"Oh, Helen!" Josephine covered her eyes wearily with her hand, as though unable to grapple with a new and startling idea.

Vernon looked amazedly, apprehensively from one sister to the other, and then ran downstairs and left them.

Persis hurried out of the kitchen.

"How's your sister gettin' on?" she asked in a stage whisper.

"Oh, I don't know. Everything is just horrid," returned Vernon desperately. "There's Helen talking about Mr. Bruch as if she was going to break her heart if his children don't get well."

"Helen — Mr. Brook?" questioned the housekeeper, with interest and surprise.

"Yes, I don't know what she means by it, and I don't want to. If there is n't anything more I can do for you, I am going to take a book down in the Barclay woods and read."

"So do, dear; so do," replied Persis soothingly. "Well, well," she thought after the girl had gone,

"I wonder if Miss Helen has found her fate on the island, too. Poor child, like as not she's havin' some pangs of her own and bearin' 'em as patiently as she does everythin' else."

The housekeeper was shaking her head over the mingled thoughts that possessed her, when Olin paused as he sometimes did at her window. His healthful, tanned face was serious, and he eyed Persis inquiringly.

"How are they all?" he asked in a subdued voice.

"Well, just middlin'," she responded. "Miss Josephine's in bed, the best place for her, and Helen's takin' care of her."

"I hear the doctor has gone back to Boston."

"You heard right."

"By Jove, it's rough!" ejaculated Randolph, setting his teeth together, and looking as though he longed for some turn of affairs which would make muscle of any account in setting things straight.

"'Tain't smooth," admitted Miss Applebee, rolling out pie-crust on a board. "Those girls should have things easy if I had the orderin' o' their lives."

"They are nice girls," declared Olin, warmly.

"So I told you some time since," returned Persis dryly, "and"—she turned her head to give him an impressive look as he stood, his elbows on the high sill—"it's my belief they've narrowed down to one, sir. There's only just one left,

and if some folks not a great way off don't look out, they 'll get left themselves."

Color rose in the tanned face at the window, while the young man smiled curiously into the earnest eyes.

"Persis, it is my impression that you are being severe to me."

"Well, ain't you a great feller!" returned the housekeeper with open scorn.

"About six feet. Would you mind adding to your information and telling me which choice is reserved for Hobson?"

"Hey?"

"In other words, which one of the three graces is left?"

"That's for you to find out," replied Persis, laying her pastry over the pie-plate and balancing it on one deft hand, while she trimmed off its edges with the other.

"Do you know you've made me rather uncomfortable?" asked Olin, after a reflective pause.

"Glad to hear it," returned the other with a defiant, rising inflection. "There ain't so much comfort on the island to-day that you should have it all."

"Do you think the woman who has made most of the misery will be likely to appear here again?"

"I don't know; but I'm all ready for her if she comes. I hain't a doubt she prowled around here yesterday while we was all gone."

"Would you like to have me stay about the premises?"

"Law, no. I shan't need any help," said Miss Applebee, an ominous sparkle in her eyes.

"If she should come, her presence ought to be kept from Miss Josephine," suggested Olin, rather fearing from the housekeeper's expression that in such an emergency her excitement might carry her away.

"Teach your grandmother how to drive ducks," retorted Persis, an extra edge being given to her tone by the fact that she scorched her hand as she was slipping her pie into the little oven.

"Is Miss Vernon upstairs, too?" asked Randolph, after a minute.

"No, she has taken a book down into the Barclay woods," responded Persis with charitable explicitness. "You ain't goin', are you?" she added sarcastically.

"I don't see that I can be of any service here until that pie is baked, anyway." He departed, and as he was walking down Maiden Lane his Aunt Charlotte spied and called him.

"Have you been in next door?" she asked, coming out upon her back piazza.

"I have been speaking with Persis. Is Aunt Agnes' head any better?"

"Yes, she is coming out of it, but the poor dear has been dreadfully shaken. She is remorseful because of what she calls her selfishness in not breaking the news more easily to Josephine, and she is as much crushed by the doctor's trouble as though it were her own. If Agnes has a fault, it

is that she is a bit morbid about anything that concerns Dr. Latimer. Well," added Miss Norman, looking sharply at her nephew, "this means a great change in the prospects of the Ivison girls. They would all have profited greatly by Josephine's marriage."

"Yes, but of course they have no thought for that now."

"How much longer are you thinking of staying on the island?" asked Miss Charlotte with apparent irrelevance.

"Why? Are you growing tired of me?" asked her nephew.

"No; but I have been thinking," Miss Norman tried to feel her way cautiously on ground she was not sure he would approve, "that of late you have been as constantly with those girls as Dickie has."

"Well, why not?"

"A young man does n't always see these things right." Miss Charlotte looked away from the quizzical eyes and adopted a virtuous air. "The Ivisons have no protector, and it is only natural that a woman cognizant of their movements as I am should take thought for them. I would suggest to you, Olin, sorry as I am to lose one day of your vacation, that you spend the short remainder of it elsewhere."

"Why? You are mysterious."

"You should not force me to put it in words, my dear," returned Miss Charlotte with dignity; "but since you will have plain speaking, I will

say that your attentions, though I believe quite equally divided, might have the effect to rouse expectations in one of those girls."

Randolph smiled. "Your anxiety does n't take the form, then, of fearing that I might be falling into an unrequited attachment?"

"That idea is simply absurd."

"Because your geese are such swans, I suppose."

Miss Norman regarded him with fond admiration as he leaned, tall and strong, against the corner post of the piazza.

"Partly that," she answered, "and partly because I know you are a cool-headed and ambitious man, and would hardly be in danger of renouncing the many possibilities open to you for the sake of a sentiment for either of those unknown girls."

"Their status is satisfactory to Dr. Latimer."

"My dear," — Miss Norman did not like the serious expression which had come into her nephew's face, — "Dr. Latimer's case is totally different. He is a power whose action nobody would question. He has everything which most men of your age have yet to attain."

"I did n't know you were what the novels call worldly, Aunt Charlotte." Olin regarded her curiously.

"I deny that my feeling in the matter is anything but reasonable and sensible," returned Miss Norman warmly. "I would not have you marry for money or any other ignoble motive, but we

know dozens of sweet, educated, well-connected, good girls who could bring their helpful share to the partnership which marriage is — could give their husbands as much as they received; in other words, any one of them would be a suitable match."

Randolph shook his head. "I know you have my interests very kindly at heart, Aunt Charlotte, and I am afraid I shall disappoint you by declaring that none of these prudential considerations have a particle of weight with me."

"Then I am very much surprised," returned Miss Norman severely. "I considered you a thoroughly well-balanced young man. Pray, have you any definite purpose in startling me in this way?"

"I advise you not to borrow trouble," returned the other vaguely. "I only thought since you had advanced your ideas, I might as well confess to you that my love for a woman and hers for me will be my sole consideration when the time comes for me to decide upon a matrimonial step. I am romantic, Aunt Charlotte, much as it may surprise you, and think that nothing the world can offer can compare in satisfaction with one touch of the hand from the woman I love."

His voice had a ring in it Miss Norman did not know, and she amazedly regarded the face which expressed the fervor of his closing words.

"Dr. Latimer thought as you do twenty years ago, and so wrecked his life," she answered coldly.

"Dr. Latimer thinks as I do now," he returned.

Miss Norman was startled and resentful, but she knew the fruitlessness of any attempt to move Olin, who was entirely independent of her, — in fact, better off than she in this world's goods. She set a quick guard upon her tongue. No matter what fate befell, she would not quarrel with her nephew; and as she looked now into his strong, handsome face, she beheld with a sudden fleeting pang of conviction the sweetness of that crowning joy which her life had missed.

"Trust me, Aunt Charlotte," he said, coming near and putting his arm around her. It was an unheard-of caress from him to her, and her moved heart drank in the warmth of his smile. The relatives of a man newly in love frequently pick up in uncomprehending amazement the crumbs which fall from his overflowing table.

Miss Norman said no word, but as she looked after him a few minutes later, swinging across the field, two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

Over the hill went Olin, and down through the road, thinking over his talk with Persis, and whistling softly as he revolved in his mind the disturbing information she had imparted. Emerging from the fragrant avenue, he strode past the down-along Martins', through another field, then jumping a fence entered the Barclay woods.

His steps crackling through the underbrush caused Vernon to look up rather uneasily, and

when he caught sight of her she was gazing with big, apprehensive eyes in his direction, while the closed book in her lap had not the air of having successfully claimed her attention.

She bit her lip at sight of him, and put up one hand to her disordered hair.

"Could n't you get away from your friends any farther than this?" he asked reproachfully.

"It seems it was not far enough," she returned.

"To say why girls act so or so
Or don't, 'ould be presumin',"

quoted Olin. "I am not going away just for the sake of one snub, after having had such a search for you," and coming near he remained standing, experimentally. "Did you really come here to secure solitude?"

"I came here to cry," answered Vernon.

"Well, don't stop on my account. Let me be handkerchief-holder," he returned persuasively, sitting down near her.

"I haven't begun yet," said Vernon with dignity.

"What hour had you set for commencing?" inquired Olin respectfully.

"You are shamefully unsympathetic," she returned.

"Indeed I'm not. I am envious. The last twenty-four hours have been so miserable that if weeping were in my line it would have been a welcome relief. I wish you would tell me what

thoughts you found diverting enough to postpone the other occupation."

As he spoke Randolph looked at the girl so strangely that she wondered.

"If I should gratify your curiosity you would n't like it," she replied.

"I dare say not," he answered, setting his teeth, "but if you don't mind I would rather hear just the same."

His face was so serious that Vernon wondered still more. "At your own peril, then."

"At my own peril."

"Very well. I was thinking what a lovely world this would be for women if there were n't any men in it."

Randolph's face grew radiant. "Then it is Helen!" he ejaculated, sending his hat whizzing up between the tall firs, and before its return lifting Vernon's hand and impulsively kissing it.

The girl blushed, but stared at him in such genuine amazement that he gave a short, excited laugh.

"Never mind; just an attack of emotional insanity—hereditary in our family. Go on," eagerly; "you're a man-hater. Well?"

"Not—not exactly," returned Vernon, covering her cheek with a cool hand. "Perhaps they mean well enough, but they make us so much trouble. Think of Josephine. Why, you ought to see her. She looks as if all her color and sparkle had been washed out. She is as *limp*!"

"Poor girl," replied Randolph fervently.

"And you never came near us all yesterday afternoon and evening," went on Vernon slowly, speaking rather hesitatingly on account of a force and glow in his face which she did not understand, and because her heart was still fluttering from that burning kiss on her hand.

"Did you miss me?" asked Olin eagerly, and the girl began to pulsate all over at his insistent tone and look.

Her answer was cool and deliberate. "I thought it very unneighborly in you."

"I was afraid to come. You must know that. I didn't want to bore Miss Josephine, and although I scouted about occasionally, I caught no glimpse of you, so finally I went sailing. The sea was rough and the water came in at every plunge. It gave me something to do, and then I put in the rest of the time thinking about my secret."

He paused so long that Vernon had to speak.

"Oh, have you one?" she asked indifferently.

"Yes. You remember you said the island was a beautiful secret. Well, mine is still more beautiful."

He leaned toward her on one elbow and looked up into her face.

She shrank against the tree-trunk by which she was sitting and turned her eyes away.

"Where is your woman's curiosity?" he asked, after waiting vainly for her to speak.

"You know I told you I don't like secrets," she answered with an effort.

"Ah, but that, you said, was when you were not in them. You are in this one. It is you who make it beautiful. Vernon, darling," his hand closed over hers again, "I'll tell you my secret, and it is a life-and-death matter with me whether or no you like it, for it is that I love you."

And all the still wood seemed to sing with the refrain, "I love you; I love you," as Vernon answered him with her sweet, frank eyes, forgetting in that first blissful moment that any other woman was less happy.

For she was the youngest princess, and all the best gifts come to her.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE IVISON CONQUEST.

AGNES NORMAN had dressed and was sitting in the upper room of the Nautilus when Olin came home. She gave an affirmative reply to his request to come up, and when his beaming face appeared, she instinctively increased the heroic effort she had been making to throw off her depression.

Randolph on his part at sight of her tried to veil his happiness and constrain himself to a mood more suited to hers.

"It does me good only to look at you, Olin," she said wistfully.

"I wish I were not so helpless to remove your trouble," he returned, taking the chair beside her.

"I am sure things will look a little brighter when I get out of doors again. I shall go downstairs soon."

"You have had a hard pull," said Olin sympathetically.

"Yes, but my poor Josephine! Your face as you came up the stairs just now was like a sunbeam. I don't want to bring you under a cloud. Talk to me of what you have been doing and

whom you have been seeing to get you into such a radiant mood."

"May I?" eagerly. "I am afraid it will sound very selfish, but Aunt Charlotte is out and I want to tell you before she returns. I have been asking Vernon to marry me."

Agnes smiled at him thoughtfully. "I did not expect this. I did not know you were serious. You both seem so young to me."

"Well," smiling back, "is that all you are going to say?"

Miss Norman put her arm around his shoulders. "I am going to kiss you," which she did, her nephew returning the salute warmly. "Then I must say that I think Vernon Ivison is a very fortunate girl. She has won my best young man, and just this minute I'm a little bit jealous."

"Ah! you don't know what that girl is," exclaimed Randolph earnestly, and went on with that devout eulogy upon the unrivaled attributes of his lady with which a lover usually favors his nearest of kin, who, if he or she be sympathetically inclined, receives the confidence with respectful seriousness externally, however many mental reservations may be felt.

"Vernon is a very sweet, sincere girl," replied Agnes, when it again became her privilege to speak, "and to be the first love of such a fresh, unspoiled heart is good fortune indeed. However, your Aunt Charlotte" —

"Hang Aunt Charlotte! I won't hear one word against" —

"Stop, Olin. Love ought to reform even your foibles ; so I shall expect you to become very reasonable. Your Aunt Charlotte is absolutely devoted to you. Common gratitude should suggest that you be patient with her now if she does display any coolness or disappointment. You must admit that Fate has played her a strange trick in giving her one of the Ivisons for a niece. Had this calamity not come to Dr. Latimer everything would have been different. As it is, I dare say Charlotte may feel reluctant to sanction your step ; but I shall use all my influence, and your best weapon will be in this case, as in all cases, love, 'the greatest thing in the world.' Be kind to her, Olin. You young men do not know the strength with which we childless women twine our heart's affections about you who give us our nearest realization of motherhood. Don't wound Aunt Charlotte. Be gentle and patient now. The end will be the same. Of course she is helpless to interfere with your movements, and you will be glad to remember afterward that you did not hurt her. She may be affected by her prejudice or ambition at first, but all that will pass."

"I rely on you to be kind to Vernon," said Randolph. "It is hard for her to have her sisters under a cloud at this time ; but she loves me, Aunt Agnes ;" Olin added this with a child-like humility which seemed to come from a part of his nature which his aunt had never suspected. "I did not suppose that anybody could care for me so much as Vernon does."

Affectionate pride in him rose to Miss Norman's lips ; but she valued this new grace in the young man too much to give it voice.

"Determine to deserve her confidence," she replied, patting the shoulder upon which her hand still rested, "and then you will keep that inestimable treasure of love always. I have looked upon a great number of married lives, Olin. Most people rush into that state to be made happy. That is the quicksand in which their hopes sink. Somebody has well said that 'marriage is only a ceremony pledging two persons to charity for the failings of each other.' I wish more couples realized that. Then the happy hopefulness with which they start out would stand better the strains that come to every life, and there would be less bitter disappointment."

Poor Vernon, when she parted from her lover, found that her courage was oozing away. As she stepped up on the Sea Shell piazza it suddenly seemed as though she had done an unfeeling thing to yield to a wealth of happiness at this time. She realized all that Josephine had suffered and was suffering as she had not before, and felt like a guilty thing as she entered the house.

Persis noted her serious, troubled face.

"Did Mr. Randolph find you?" she asked carelessly, and then, observing the girl's sudden, conscious blush, the good soul became afflicted with apprehension lest the last of the beloved orphans

had reaped only sorrow from the summer which opened so promisingly.

"He might let you have a little peace, I think," she grumbled, thinking to console at least Vernon's pride if she could not heal her heart; "always wantin' to know where you are and taggin' of you 'round. I'm out of all patience with him."

Vernon bit her lip and looked furtively at Miss Applebee.

"I like to have him follow me," she answered softly, with a half-frightened glance toward the stairway.

"Oh, well, what does it amount to, anyway?" returned Persis, startled by this declaration. "He ain't anythin' so very great. His aunts think he's goin' to set the river afire, but law, I guess you could find somebody on every block in Boston smarter'n he is. I would n't think very much about him if I was you."

Miss Applebee was uncomfortably conscious that she was locking the stable door after having done all in her power to liberate the steed.

"I should n't find anybody that I thought any smarter," returned Vernon. Then because an irrepressible wave of emotion passed over her and she must make some demonstration, she squeezed Persis's substantial arm and the lovelight kindled her eyes.

The housekeeper stared at her blankly. "I tell you he ain't any great things," she said mechanically.

"I am sorry you think so," replied the girl, her happiness overflowing and momentarily carrying away her scruples, "because I am engaged to him and" —

"He's a splendid feller!" ejaculated Persis. "There ain't any" —

"Hush — sh!" exclaimed Vernon in a warning whisper, pointing above. "The girls."

Miss Applebee threw an arm around her, swept her off into the kitchen and closed the door behind them.

Olin Randolph had an errand at Orr's Island that day. He determined to accomplish it directly after dinner, thereby leaving Agnes a clear field in which to impart her news to his Aunt Charlotte, and also that he might return in time to take Vernon sailing, as he had promised when they parted.

Walking to the upper end of the island, he borrowed a "bo't" from up-along Martin and pulled across the strip of water that divided him from his goal. As he approached Orr's he observed a knot of men talking excitedly near the dock, and as he cast a glance toward them one of their number perceived him.

"There's Olin," cried one; "he'll know." These neighbors, having seen Randolph grow from boy to man, always used his Christian name.

"Ye fool!" exclaimed Captain Gregg, who was one of the group, savagely scowling at the speaker. "D'ye need anybody to tell ye?"

Olin paused.

"Ther 's been a queer-actin' woman 'round here fer days," explained the first speaker, somewhat abashed, but addressing Randolph in the island drawl, "an' this mawnin' she's ben cuttin' up hi-gh; crazier 'n a loon. Cap'n Gregg had just come over in his flo't when she come down t' the dock. She cawt sight of him and ordered him to row her over t' see Dr. Latimer. She said, if you 'll believe it, she said she was Dr. Latimer's wife." The speaker raised the rough back of his hand to his mouth as he glanced at scowling Captain Gregg, some memory seeming to touch his sense of humor uncontrollably.

Randolph quickly turned his serious face in the same direction. "What did you do, Cap'n?"

"I said she was a li-ar," came the grim, drawling response.

"She got mahdder 'n thunder," pursued the narrator. "Says she, 'Then I'll take your bo't myself,' says she, an' Cap'n Gregg spoke back, says he, 'B' Judas, you better come tr-y it.'" This time the guffaw burst forth in spite of the sober, half-frightened faces of the others of the group.

"She run at me like a cat," declared old Gregg. "I stepped out o' the way an' she turned after me an' then seemed to change her mind, an' jumped squar' into the water."

"She did? What then?" ejaculated Olin.

"Oh," growled Gregg. "I did n't have time to think, so I was fool enough to drop into the flo't an' h'ist her out."

Olin's brow contracted. "You saved her!" he exclaimed, while a pang of ungovernable disappointment wrung him.

"He hauled her in 'fore she'd gone down twice," explained the first narrator eagerly, "but when we got her on dry land she was dead all the same!"

"Dead!" repeated Randolph, feeling himself flush under the revulsion of feeling.

"Yes. Dawcter said 't was heart disease."

"How long ago?" asked Olin.

"'Bout an hour, I gness."

"Where have you taken the body?"

"Up yawnder 't the store."

"I should like to see it."

"I'll take ye," volunteered the Orr's islander, and they turned away, despite Captain Gregg's contempt of such undue interest in a demented member of a superfluous sex.

Olin's return later to the Nautilus was accomplished under such excitement that he scarcely felt the ground beneath his feet. Even his love affair was pushed to a secondary place, so that the repression and stern martyrdom in Aunt Charlotte's face as she met him were wholly unnoticed. He seized her by the hand and drew her into the room where Agnes was sitting, and there he told his news, which threw the latter into a fit of trembling and caused the elder Miss Norman to feel that a special dispensation had been granted her to make Olin's engagement bearable. Her mind instantly

vaulted into a future where she heard herself saying complacently to some inquiring friend: "Oh, yes; Mrs. Randolph and Mrs. Latimer are sisters."

"I can't seem to think, Olin," said Agnes with a tremulous smile. "What shall we do first?"

"Plain enough," he answered cheerily. "I shall throw a few things into a bag, go up to Portland, and hang around the telegraph office until I can bring Dr. Latimer back with me."

"How about telling the girls?" asked Miss Charlotte.

"I would n't," replied Agnes. "I have been sitting with Josephine. She is in a state of lassitude, which after all she has endured is better for her than suspense. If we could be sure of communicating with the doctor soon it might do. But we don't know certainly when the message will find him, and my opinion is we had better wait a little. The poor child has received enough shocks."

"Then if we are not to tell her, I suppose it will be best to keep it from all, even Persis," suggested Miss Norman.

"It hardly seems right to Vernon," said Randolph, "for me to leave her to-day without an explanation."

Miss Charlotte saw her opportunity to distinguish herself triumphantly with her beloved nephew. She shrank a little from such heights of magnanimity, but with a mighty effort and sus-

tained by the thought of Dr. Latimer, after a moment's wavering she took the step.

"Agnes has been telling me something wonderful," she said with an arch look. "I might have preferred to hear it from your own lips, but I am very glad you are happy, dear, and we will try to make Vernon love us."

She was repaid by the hearty manner in which Olin kissed and thanked her, and was incited to even greater deeds.

"I think we might take Vernon in here and explain matters to her," she said. "No doubt she is discreet enough not to betray the secret until the proper moment."

This plan was accordingly pursued. Olin, instead of taking his fiancée sailing, brought her into his aunt's cottage, where, *en famille*, she was put in possession of the news. That was a supremely happy hour to Vernon before Olin's boat went. His aunts were equally cordial to her, and her new position of dignity was made very sweet and natural.

"I have not dared tell my sisters of my engagement yet," she said. "Of course it was not possible under the circumstances, and now a great burden seems lifted from me as well as Josephine."

Vernon went to the boat with her lover, then to Captain Amos' store for the mail. Finding a letter in Dr. Latimer's hand for her sister, she took her way to the latter's room.

Josephine was sitting in a rocking-chair looking out on the sea. The day had dragged by like a weary lifetime. She had been watching for this letter ever since the boat's whistle, and now drank in the closely written sentences which were like life-giving nectar to her drooping soul. The pages were full of cheerful, loving talk and spoke of some books the writer had sent to her. Josephine looked up from it with a bewildered brow.

Vernon was regarding her wistfully.

"He writes so naturally," she said, "I cannot realize that this is going on forever."

"I don't believe it will, Josephine," returned the other gently. "I would try to look upon it as a test which if I proved brave and worthy would be removed in time."

Josephine gazed at her young sister in thoughtful surprise. What was there in her face that had not been there yesterday? "This trouble has matured her," she thought.

"Come here, Vernon. I like to look at you," she said.

Vernon obeyed with heightened color and sat down at the other's feet.

"I have sent Helen out of doors, and I'd like you to stay with me a little while."

"I want to. I was going to, anyway," returned Vernon.

The truth which would have power to send Josephine into transports of hopefulness fairly trembled on her lips; but her sister's face easily dissuaded

her from assuming such a responsibility. Josephine seemed actually to have grown thin; and that dazed look of eye and brow troubled even Vernon's inexperience.

She leaned her head lovingly against the other's knee, and one of Josephine's hands smoothed the brown-gold waves of hair, while with the other she held her letter and re-read it.

The next morning Helen came into the Norman cottage with a troubled face.

"Josephine did not sleep at all last night," she said to Agnes. "I am anxious about her. I don't think my right course is to keep her here amid all these dear associations. I am thinking of taking her right back to Boston. Don't you think we had better go to Portland this afternoon, spend the night, and then" —

"Tell her, Agnes; mercy do!" exclaimed Miss Charlotte, who was also in the kitchen, where the interview was held.

"Yes, Helen," said the other gently, "sit down a minute, dear. A very wonderful thing has happened. That poor, misguided, stormy life which came between Josephine and her happiness is ended at last. The woman died at Orr's Island yesterday."

The sudden excitement which showed in the girl's face made Agnes proceed.

"You can see by its effect upon you what it will be to Josephine to hear this."

"Oh, it cannot do her harm,—nothing but

good!" burst forth Helen, her countenance illumined.

"Yes, perhaps," returned Agnes cautiously; "if we were only sure Dr. Latimer would be easily found. He is a physician, and, better than that, a wonderfully wise man and Josephine's lover. Wait for him a little. I have been calculating, and if Olin's telegram reached him last night he will arrive here on the four o'clock boat this afternoon. Of course you must be the judge, Helen, but" —

"If there is a possibility of Dr. Latimer's being here so soon as that, I would rather leave it all to him," replied Helen, her face beaming. "Oh," in her relief throwing an arm around Miss Charlotte, who happened to be standing nearest, "how can we be thankful enough!" and the tired girl, dropping her head on Charlotte's shoulder, broke down and wept.

All that was kind and sympathetic in Miss Norman's nature rose as she embraced Dickie's teacher. Certainly her relations toward the Ivisons seemed to be forming in a new direction,—one that was rather restful after all.

Agnes Norman went to the dock that afternoon to meet the boat. How her heart beat as the Merriconeag puffed into sight in the distance! And how her eyes were strained to make out the faces on its deck as it approached from Harpswell!

The seconds were minutes and the minutes

hours, but the boat's bell rang at last and Agnes' heart leaped as she saw the two men she was hoping for.

Olin stepped off first, then she bit her lip and her eyes swam as Dr. Latimer's hand clasped hers and the strong, serene face, pale but radiant, looked down at her.

Not a word passed between them until all three were ascending the hill.

"Can it be that it was day before yesterday that I was here?" said the doctor quietly. "I have been living outside the measurements of time, evidently. Does Josephine know I have come?"

"No, we could not be sure when you would arrive, and so thought best not to excite her."

"Then she still knows nothing of what has occurred?"

"Nothing. We feared to tell her."

"Is she so ill?"

"I do not exactly understand her condition; but we concluded it was best to leave all revelation to you."

"Then will you precede me, please, Agnes, and tell her that I am coming to see her?"

Miss Norman nodded and hurried on. It was one of the unusual hot afternoons which in August sometimes precede the coolness of evening at the island, and, walking through Maiden Lane around to the front of the cottage, Agnes saw, through an open window, Josephine, white as a lily in face and gown, lying on the divan.

She entered the house and sat down beside the girl.

"It is warm," she remarked, fanning herself.

"I suppose so, out of doors," replied Josephine.

"Did Dr. Latimer tell you that he meant to come to the island to visit you?"

"Oh, no," returned the girl, slowly shaking her head.

"I think he will. I have looked for him this very day."

Josephine regarded her with sombre eyes.

"That would not be his way," she said.

"I see no reason why he should not visit you. Would n't you like to see him?"

"Like to!" a transforming smile slowly illumined the white face, and before it had died away Dr. Latimer came in at the door.

Agnes slipped out, but not before she had heard the dry sob which caught in Josephine's bosom as she raised herself, eagerly held out her arms and dropped them. She looked at him with repressed expectancy.

He came near and knelt by her couch, she still looking at him incredulously, doubtfully. It was so unlike him to put his hand to the plow and look back. What did he wish her to do? What was his plan?

He looked upon the ravages of sleeplessness and woe in her face with a world of compassionate tenderness. "Josephine, darling," he said, and took her in his arms, where she sighed so deeply

that he feared she had fainted ; but her own low voice reassured him : —

“Is it really not a dream ?”

“It is real that I am here and holding you, my love. That is all that is real. Would you not like to believe the rest a dream, — all the wretchedness and separation? You may, for it is over and past as though it had never been. I have come to stay with you as long as we both live.”

A minute afterward there was hurrying to and fro in the Sea Shell, and Persis and the girls, as they hastened to do the doctor's bidding, devoutly blessed the prudence which had caused it to be Dr. Latimer's breast and no one's else upon which Josephine was now lying in a dead faint. Her sisters, the minute their watching eyes descried his form coming across the field, had told Persis all that had occurred, and upon hearing him call, the three rushed down from above stairs.

Excess of happiness could not prostrate for long a woman of Josephine's vitality. When half an hour later Olin ventured to approach the house, looking up at the windows for an encouraging sign from Vernon, he was welcomed at the door by the girl herself, who began to have time now to think of her own affairs and blushed as she welcomed him.

Randolph came in and found Dr. Latimer sitting on the divan with Josephine, whose happy face had gained a little color.

Persis and Helen were flitting back and forth

making preparations for tea, and occasionally refreshing themselves by a satisfactory look at the reunited lovers.

The housekeeper hastened to Olin. "Well, at last I can congratulate you," she said, shaking him by the hand. "This poor child," seizing Vernon's arm and turning to the others, "has had to hide her happiness under a bushel the best way she could."

"Oh, girls," said Vernon, for her sisters were regarding her wonderingly, "we could n't ask your advice, or permission, or anything; could we, Olin?"

"Perfectly impossible," returned that young man as he slipped an arm around her.

"Child!" exclaimed Helen, coming up and involuntarily trying to draw her sister away, "have you been getting into mischief while I was so pre-occupied? I like you, Olin — but Josephine, she is too young, don't you think so — don't you, Dr. Latimer?"

The doctor had already risen. "This is not a good day to ask me anything that requires a cool head," he replied. "I think I can't have watched you two very closely," he added, smiling on them both.

"I beg you won't apologize," returned Olin gravely. "I think we have managed quite as well as though you had, and nothing is needed now to complete our happiness except the blessing of this company."

This made Helen smile through some unreasonable tears which were not dried when she saw Vernon folded affectionately in Josephine's arms. Her thoughts flew to the far-away ship which was cleaving the billows too slowly for the most anxious heart on board.

The days seemed long ere the message came at last which the quiet girl awaited with concealed eagerness.

Dr. Latimer came into the cottage one morning with an envelope in his hand.

"Good news from Mr. Bruch," he announced; "his children are better."

"Oh Helen, Helen," called Vernon. "Mr. Bruch's children are getting well."

The girl came running downstairs, and Dr. Latimer showed her the brief message which meant so much.

"Won't he bring his children with him when he comes back?" she asked.

"I doubt if he returns to this country," was the calm reply. "In our last talk together before I bade him good-by he seemed to think it likely he would remain in Germany."

All the joy that the cablegram had brought faded from Helen's face. A blank desolation chilled her.

She did not drop her lids so quickly that Dr. Latimer failed to read her frank face, and the next time he was alone with Josephine he told her his surprising impressions.

"I remember something vaguely," returned Josephine, "something she said to me about Mr. Bruch during my dream of misery, but it was swamped in my own overpowering trouble. Oh, Helen must not be unhappy."

Josephine made an early opportunity to catechize her sister so insistently and lovingly that Helen owed to her the unspoken eloquence of the German during their last interview, and weepingly deplored that she had let him go without a word of regret at his loss.

"But what could I do, Josephine?" she added piteously. "Just then it was to me as though we were talking across a little grave."

"You say he promised to write to you," returned the eldest soothingly. "Then don't worry. It will turn out all right."

"But how can it?" asked Helen. "I am afraid he thinks he could n't support the children here, and he does n't mean to come back, I know from what Dr. Latimer says."

So Josephine once more appealed to Dr. Latimer, and observing the grave thoughtfulness in his face she began to entertain sanguine hopes at once. These were soon justified, owing to the promptness and energy with which Dr. Latimer set his wits and influence at work, and by the time the summer party had said farewell to the island and returned to Boston there were hopeful indications that a library situation suited to Mr. Bruch's tastes and abilities would ere the following winter be open to his acceptance.

Dr. Latimer, as soon as this prospect was tolerably certain, stated the fact in a letter to his German friend, and by return mail Helen received an important missive from her absent lover. It said that the kindness and friendliness with which she had favored him in her letters emboldened him to tell her what he had longed to declare at the island. If she would deign to make him the happiest of living men he would return to America. Otherwise he would remain many thousands of miles away from her too-sweet face.

Upon reading this the "too-sweet face" grew very flushed and happy, and seating herself at her desk Helen penned a brief but pregnant epistle and herself carried it to the letter-box and dropped it in.

Mr. Bruch had told her of the doctor's great kindness, and Helen, in the midst of the thousand and one things devolving upon her in these busy days, went on from the mail-box to Dr. Latimer's house to tell him with blushing candor what she had done and how fervently she thanked him.

Dr. Latimer kissed her for the first time in their acquaintance. "I congratulate you, my dear Helen," he said, "and I wish affairs had moved in a way to bring Mr. Bruch to the wedding."

For there was to be a wedding soon, and not the quiet little affair the doctor and Josephine would have preferred. Dr. Latimer allowed the Misses Norman to persuade him that the fact of Josephine's strangeness to Boston society made it im-

portant that her future husband's friends should meet her, and it had at last been settled that the ceremony should take place at the Normans' house, while the list of those invited to the reception passed under the eyes of those ladies before it was considered complete.

Josephine, who would have been married in a gray gown at daybreak by the nearest minister, had Dr. Latimer suggested such a course, fell in with the present plan with equal docility. Her sisters were her bridesmaids, and a college friend of Olin's stood up with Helen.

The beauty of the girls, and especially the stately brilliance of the bride, was the subject of much comment when finally the happy evening came.

Charlotte Norman was as content on the occasion as Agnes, and once as she looked at Josephine, pure and bright in her white robes, a sudden memory came to her of the first morning she saw her, watching stealthily through the slats of the side window, and she put the remembrance aside with vigorous impatience. It had no place among current events.

There were the three Ivison girls now, meeting the throng of Boston's elect which flowed slowly past them, and here was Charlotte Norman complacently viewing the trio and aware that they were a credit to her.

Vernon looked bewitching. In the bodice of her filmy bridesmaid dress appeared, half-hidden,

an odd little pin, the head of which was the translucent green stone telling of murmuring waves on Pebbly Beach.

Miss Charlotte had remarked it with faint protest, but Vernon insisted that thus the island should come to the wedding, and Miss Norman yielded. Not Olin himself was more single-hearted than this stiff-necked aunt had become.

The reception was so nearly finished that a cable message which had arrived for Dr. Latimer was put into his hands by Persis, who, in the softest and richest of black silk gowns, had beamed all the evening from inconspicuous corners.

"Mr. Bruch," said the doctor, as he tore open the envelope and glanced at the contents. He smiled at Helen, whose very ears grew pink as she read the message. Then she returned it to the hand he extended.

"Mr. Bruch has received Helen's letter," said the doctor to Josephine. "A Yankee would have cabled: 'Coming.'"

The bride looked at the paper with eager interest, then lifted her dark eyes to her husband's, full of appreciation of the poetry and fervor embodied in the words she had read:—

"I come."

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